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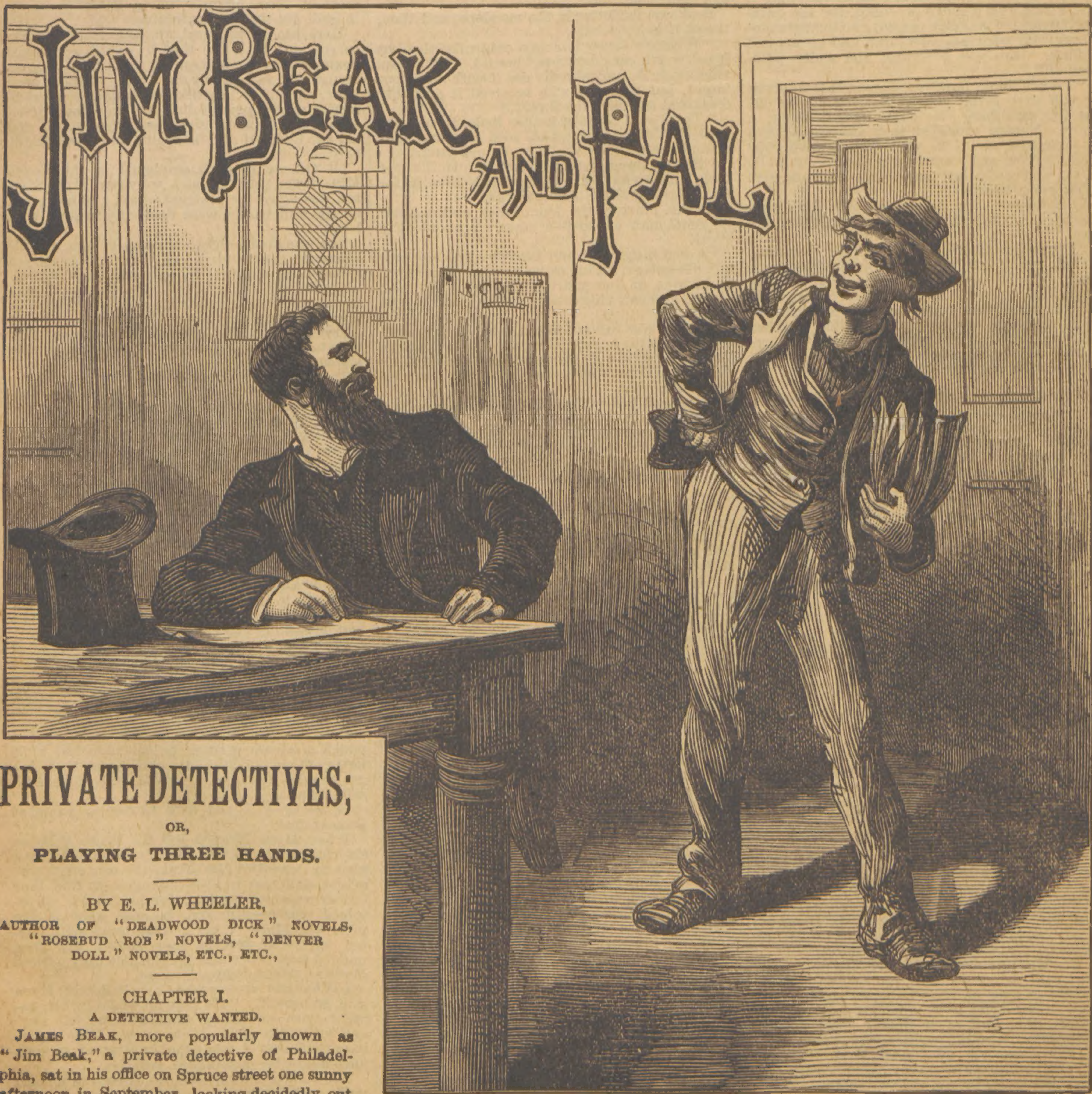
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PRIVATE DETECTIVES;

OR,

PLAYING THREE HANDS.

BY E. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "DENVER
DOLL" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.,

CHAPTER I.

A DETECTIVE WANTED.

JAMES BEAK, more popularly known as "Jim Beak," a private detective of Philadelphia, sat in his office on Spruce street one sunny afternoon in September, looking decidedly out of sorts.

HE PAUSED, THRUST ONE HAND IN HIS HIP POCKET, AS IF TO DRAW A WEAPON, AND WITH A MOCK FROWN, DEMANDED: "WHO'S AN IMP, JIM BEAK?"

He was a well-built man of twenty-seven years, and wore a fine glossy black beard. An observer, knowing nothing about him, would have taken him to be forty, at the least, all on account of the beard.

Well dressed, he would have been a handsome man, for he had a pleasing face, lit up by a pair of keen, dark eyes—eyes that could silently speak volumes, either in enmity or friendship.

Unfortunately, Mr. Beak's good personal appearance was somewhat compromised by a dress-suit which was glossy and well-worn, the once cloth-covered buttons in several instances being minus the covering, and the silk tile upon his office table showing certain evidences of hard usage.

The detective had been glancing over the columns of a daily paper, with his brows knitted in a sort of frown, or in worryment—it was hard to tell which.

He finally laid aside the paper, with an exclamation of impatience.

"Heigh ho!" he yawned, "confound the luck. Nothing new, and nothing to do. If something don't turn up bright before long"—with a rueful look at his garments—"I shall have to give the detective business the go-by, and strike a job at street-cleaning. Ha, ha! what an idea! Fancy Jim Beak wielding a broom, or handling a hoe, along with a gang of *dagos*, for the humble pittance of a dollar per day, or thereabouts! Never! I'd turn huckster first, and go around yelling, 'Ere you go—sweet and white' potatoes, oh!"

"I don't think, however, James, that adversity will ever bring you to that. You was cut out for something else than menial labor, I know. Nature ordained that you should live by your wits, and if all your friends have gone back on you, and your vocation turns out to be N. G., you're the last man to lay down and say: 'I'm going to croak!'"

This did not seem to comfort Mr. Beak particularly, for he looked more downcast than before.

"I wonder where Spider is?" he went on. "That young imp is a cure for the blues, any time, and I'll acknowledge I've got 'em the worst kind to-day. Ah! as usual—Satan is always at hand when you're talking about him"—which assertion was due to the fact that a rather jolly and shabby-looking personage had suddenly entered the room—a lad of the "gamin" species, with a bundle of newspapers under his arm.

He was tall, very slim, and perhaps seventeen years of age, although he looked even younger and more roguish than that—roguish, we say, because the very essence of good-nature and mischief shone from his deep-blue eyes.

His face, too, in its expression, indicated that he was at all times ready for fun.

He was not a bad-looking lad, albeit he was shockingly dirty, and his attire was poor and ill-fitting—more designed for winter than summer.

Jim Beak's remarks evidently had been overheard by this young individual, as he entered, for he paused, thrust one hand in his hip pocket, as if he were about to draw a weapon, and with a mock frown, demanded:

"Who's an imp, Jim Beak?"

"You are, Spider," Beak assured, his face lighting up. "Come in and sit, you rascal. I was just saying I wished you would come."

"Why?" Spider asked, as he edged to a chair. "Anything new on ther docket?"

"Nary a thing! I've got the worst case of blues you ever saw."

"I know what'll cure 'em?"

"What?"

"Go fall in love wi' some girl. Tell ye, Jim, there's nothing like et. When papers won't sell, I jest sail right down to Middle Alley, hold a spell o' courtship wi' my gal, Botts, on Maloney's doorstep, an' when I come back, I can sell papers jest like suckin' eggs."

"I'm doubtful if that remedy would help me," Beak said, with a dry laugh. "The cure would be worse than the ailment, I fancy."

"Humph. You're the queerest feller I ever see'd, Jim. Ef I had them whiskers o' yourn, I'd go mashin' up an' down Chestnut street, all day long—that's no chestnut, neither!"

"Oh! dry up! Won't you ever let up on the whiskers?"

"Not as long as the wind goes sighin' thru 'em!" "But come, now—ain't yer goin' ter buy an *item*, or er *Call*, or er *News*? Ther darned o'd papers ain't sellin' worth a cent, to-day!"

"Buy a paper?" ejaculated Beak. "Why, I've just been figgerin' up my cash account, and I find that in the future, unless something turns up, there are mighty few fifteen-cent meals in prospect."

"Pshaw! Something will turn up—and I wish there would, too, for it's hot, sellin' papers. Say! I've got an idea, and you've got a head like a hen-hawk—see what you make out of this. Maybe it's graft."

The newsboy then produced a letter, and handed it to Beak.

The stamp end of the envelope had been torn off, showing that the letter had been opened and read.

The envelope was addressed simply to "Terrol Taylor, Philadelphia, Pa."

"Singular name—Terrol," Beak muttered, as he withdrew the letter from the envelope. "Ah! let me see—let me see. What's this?"

The letter read, as follows:

"Phila., Sept. 10th.

"TERROL TAYLOR:—

"You are a coward, a liar, and a thief. You and I are bitter enemies, so I guess you know who I am. One of us must die. Meet me at Atlantic City, daylight, morning of the 13th, and if you are not what I have called you, we will drive down the beach, and duel with revolvers.

"UNKNOWN."

"Well, what der ye think of it?" Spider demanded.

"Where did you get this?"

"Found it in the street, Tenth and Pine, just as I came here."

Beak put the letter in the envelope, and then, thrust it in his pocket.

"Whoever threw it away evidently thought it not worth consideration," he said. "The man who wrote it, undoubtedly did it with malicious intent, but the man who received it probably disdained to notice the threat."

"Think so? Now, et kinder looks to me like as ef the letter really had been lost, and that brain-blowin' affair would really come off."

"Such a thing may be possible. If the two fools want to have a duel, they can have it, for all the money there is in it for us."

At this juncture the door opened, and an elderly gentleman entered—a man of about fifty years.

He was rather tall and heavily proportioned, and altogether, an imposing personage, arrayed as he was, in fine attire, including a silk hat, gloves, and carrying a cane with a massive gold head.

His face was full and florid, and the powerful jowls as well as heavy lines, gave him a stern appearance. His cold gray eyes, too, tended to indicate that he was a man of great force of character.

He paused just within the office, and leveled a sharp glance at Beak and Spider.

"Ah! excuse me," he said, "I guess this is not the place I am looking for," and he turned to go.

"Who did you wish to see?" Beak demanded, quickly.

"One James Beak, a private—ahem!—a private detective, sir."

"Exactly. I am the man. Come back, and take a seat," and Beak placed a chair for his visitor.

"You a detective?" the visitor demanded, surveying James with a critical stare. "Well!"

But he took the seat, and proceeded to business at once.

"I was directed here by Mr. Baylock, of the mercantile firm of Baylock and Blynn, who recommended you highly. I expected, however, to encounter a somewhat different person. Excuse me—I always speak to the point."

"Correct. You probably expected to find a man with a clerical visage, or else one of more foppish appearance. However, state your case. Your name, sir?"

The visitor cast a severe glance at Spider, who, to use a slang phrase, was "takin' it all in."

"Who is the boy?" was the gruff demand.

"He is named Spider. I frequently use him to good advantage—trusty, and as true as steel, sir."

"Bah! Boys are not to be trusted any more, and if you wish to work up my case, you will have to keep boys out of it. Send him out!"

This was said with surliness and a show of anger.

"You may go, Spider," Beak said, with a significant glance at the lad.

"All right, Jimmy. 'Bout time I was shoutin' anyhow. Say, sock et on ter the old man, *stiff*! Bet a hen ag'in' a Hottentot he was never a boy hisself. By-by, baby," and with a laugh that seemed to aggravate the visitor, Spider made his exit.

"You must excuse the boy," Beak said. "He's full of life, you know."

"Full of blackguardism, you mean," was the gruff response.

Then the visitor bridged a pair of gold-rimmed glasses upon his nose, and took another survey of the detective.

Beak returned the stare with perfect comacency.

"My name is Harrington Hurst," the visitor said, at length, continuing his steady scrutiny of the detective.

"Ah! indeed."

"You have heard of me?"

"Yes. You retired from the Board of Trade, not long since, reputed very wealthy."

"I did. What more do you know of me?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I reside in Germantown, on the avenue. I am in need of a detective—I prefer a private one—to ferret out who robbed my house night before last. If you think you can handle the case quietly, and without its getting abroad, you are my man!"

CHAPTER II.

A SINGULAR PROPOSITION.

PROBABLY the Pequa Mills of Philadelphia, where acres of looms give employment to many hundreds of persons, old and young, is about one of the busiest scenes in the Quaker City, during working hours, for the mills are among the foremost of those manufacturing cotton goods, if, indeed, not the most extensive.

Here, among this vast amount of machinery, surrounded by a din that it would seem must deafen them, is congregated a horde of human beings who toil day by day for a pittance, as it were, and are so identified with their work as to seem almost a part of the noisy machinery itself—men and women, girls and boys, youth and old age mingled and mingling like bees in the hive.

Of the many girls employed in the Pequa Mills at the time of which we write, Myra Morton was voted the prettiest of all, and not a few of the mill hands, were decidedly in love with her.

She was about eighteen years of age, a trifle below the medium height of women, possessed of a charming manner and presence and was always dressed with careful neatness, even though her attire was plain. Quite a contrast was her appearance, in this respect, with that of many another poorly and even slovenly-dressed girl, who toiled at the thumping, throbbing, tireless looms.

In face Myra Morton was very attractive; her features were small and round, her complexion fresh and pure, her cheeks rosy and her mouth small, and ever sweet of expression.

Purity and honor shone from her sparkling brown eyes, which she was unconsciously wont to use, with fascinating effect.

Her hair was the color of her eyes, and always was tastefully arranged.

While Myra had admirers by the score, in and outside of the mills, she never allowed them to consider that they were her company, with one exception.

This was young Carrol Carter, and he seemed to stand high in Myra's estimation, for he came regularly to the mill, at night, and escorted her home, much to the envy of the other girls, who had no beau or escort—in particular.

Carter was rather a dashing young fellow, of pleasing face and figure, about twenty-five years of age, but looking much younger. He had a "love" of a blonde mustache, as the girls averred, and was a good conversationalist and of winning manner.

He was accomplished in nearly everything in which a person need to be accomplished to be noticeable in good society, and it was therefore no wonder that pretty Myra was captivated with him.

However, it is not with Carter we would at present deal.

When Myra Morton left the Pequa Mills, at six o'clock the day of Mr. Harrington Hurst's visit to Detective Jim Beak, she was much surprised, and not a little annoyed, to find that Carter was not waiting for her, at his accustomed corner—annoyed, because some of the girls who knew of her acquaintance with Carter, stared at her, as they passed, and then nudged each other and laughed, as they noticed Myra's evident disappointment.

"What can have caused Carrol's delay?" Myra said, to herself. "He said he would be here to-night, with something important to tell me," and the pretty girl's cheeks grew a trifle rosier, in anticipation of what that matter of importance might be—a proposal, perhaps.

She waited several minutes, then took a short walk, and finally returned to the corner.

But Carter was not there, nor was he anywhere to be seen in the neighborhood.

After lingering a few moments longer, Myra drew a long sigh, and wended her way homeward alone.

It was the first time in nearly six months that she had not had Carrol Carter for her escort.

She lived in a small street not far from Twentieth and Spring Garden, where her mother kept a little candy store, and earned a few dollars toward their support.

When she reached home, Myra only with effort repressed her tears. The disappointment of not meeting Carter was keen, for his long and careful attentions to her had truly won her affection.

When she entered the store no one was in attendance, but on entering the sitting-room she found her mother seated there, in company with a stylishly-dressed man of perhaps thirty-two years.

Mrs. Morton was a woman of fifty or thereabouts, of portly figure, and possessed of a hard yet not unhandsome face, cold, calculating gray eyes, and hair that was as white as snow.

Her companion, or rather her visitor—for Myra had never seen him before to her knowledge—was a tall, muscular man, with a singularly white countenance, jet-black eyes and hair, and an expression that was both sinister and repelling.

He regarded Myra, as she entered, with a stare, that at once created in her a positive dislike for him.

"Myra, this is Mr. Gilbert," Mrs. Morton said. "He has come to see you on a matter of the utmost importance."

"To see me?" Myra replied, after a slight nod in acknowledgment of Gilbert's gracious bow.

"Yes, dear. I—I—but perhaps Mr. Gilbert can state his own case best. Be seated."

With no little wonderment, Myra laid aside her hat and seated herself.

"Ah! You see," Gilbert began, "this is rather a ticklish matter—ahem!—but there is but one way of doing it, and that is by going at it broadcast. You have, I understand, been receiving the attentions of a young man named Carrol Carter?"

Myra's eyes sparkled with a rifle of anger, while a wave of color swept over her face.

"I have been acquainted with such a person," she replied, coldly.

"Ah! yes, I know. Your mother has told me that you and Carter were in love with each other, and there was a fine prospect that your little courtship would result in marriage. Now, nothing in the world would please me better than to see you two joined in the bonds of wedlock."

"Indeed!"

"Exactly. You may be surprised at this interest on my part, but I can easily explain. Unknown to him, I am a strong personal friend of Carter's. In every-day life we are no more than speaking acquaintances, but still my love for that fellow is something great. To see him settled down with a nice little wife, such as I infer you would make, would please me exceedingly."

"Why, sir, Mr. Carter is not an unsteady young man, is he?" Myra innocently inquired.

"Oh, no; far from it. In fact, I don't know of a more exemplary young man. That's why I want to see him get married right away, you know."

"He's a handsome and dashing young fellow, and naturally much sought after, and therefore in some danger of falling into bad ways, you know. Then, too, he is liable to come into a fine sum of money, soon, and it were better he were married, than single, when he gets it—for you know, money is a powerful root of evil. He little suspects what is coming to him, and I beg of you not to mention what I have told you."

"Yes? But, sir, I cannot understand—"

"Tut! tut! I will make it plainer. I want you to marry Carrol Carter, at once. Promise me to do so, and I will lay one thousand dollars in your hands to start house-keeping with."

"Now, then, dear," spoke up Mrs. Morton, triumphantly.

Myra was more than astonished. Her looks showed it, too.

While Mr. Gilbert laughed, quietly.

"Why—why, sir, this is all very strange," Myra said, nervously. "Mr. Carter and I are not engaged. Indeed, he has never yet asked me to marry him, sir."

"Not? Oh! well, that is a matter of little consequence. You are satisfied he likes you—or, in stronger terms, loves you."

"I—I—really, sir, I don't think you ought to expect me to answer such a question."

And Myra blushed, charmingly.

"Oh! well, we will take it for granted that you both love one another," Gilbert went on, dryly. "Women have a knack of drawing a man on to propose, when he is least prepared for it. I know that, by experience. Now, my dear Miss Morton, do you not think you could draw Carter on, so that he would propose to you when you next meet again?"

"Sir!"

"Tut! tut! now. Don't let mock-modesty interfere with business. You can easily, by a little hugging and kissing, induce Carter to propose to you, and then urge him to marry you at once. Then you get the thousand dollars."

"Sir, I am astonished to think that you could believe me so bad as that!" Myra exclaimed. "Mother, who is this man?—for he is no gentleman to make such a proposal as he has!"

"Mr. Gilbert is a perfect gentleman, dear, and his motives are honorable," Mrs. Morton assured, her features relaxing none from their hardness of expression. "You will do well to heed his directions."

"But, mother, this is so strange and inconsistent."

"Pshaw! Nothing of the kind," Gilbert assured, a trifle impatiently. "It's a matter of necessity—not particularly so far as you are concerned, but, in Carter's case. If I knew of another girl he was in love with, I would try her. You see, the fact is, my dear young lady, that Carter must be a husband within three days. On your promise not to divulge to him, or any one else, the reason, I will give it to you."

Myra's curiosity was, naturally, by this time, wrought up to fever heat.

Carter must be a husband within three days? If so, why?

What could be the secret?

She hesitated a moment, and then said:

"You can give me the reason. I will be silent."

"As I supposed. You look like a sensible girl, and when you come to know the truth, you will see that all is for your interests and welfare. Indeed, I fancy you will drop to the game at once."

Myra looked rather doubtful at this. The expression occurred to her as being decidedly inelegant, coming as it did from a man who wore a diamond ring and pin.

"You see," Gilbert went on, affably, "Carrol has an eccentric uncle who worships the boy after a peculiar fashion, although he has thus far never helped him to a penny. Satisfied, at last, that Carrol has arrived at an age where good young men begin to think of settling down, this uncle has concluded to give Carrol a most handsome sum of money, immediately after his marriage, which he has finally decided must take place at once."

"The uncle has had Carrol shadowed, and thus found that he was keeping company with you. He has investigated your antecedents and come to the conclusion that you are the very young woman that Carrol must marry. I have been commissioned, as his agent, to see that the marriage takes place in three days' time. If it does not, Carrol will never receive a cent. Do you see? Then, too, Carrol must know nothing of this coming fortune, until after the marriage."

"On your sacred promise to get him to marry you, which, no doubt, will be one of the easiest things in the world, I will pay you the one thousand dollars. You then can tell him you have saved up that much, and he will think it—"

"What! tell a lie?" Myra exclaimed. "No, not I!"

"Tut! tut! A little fib like that won't hurt any one."

"It would hurt me!" was the response. "I had better bringing up, sir, than to tell an untruth."

Gilbert glanced at the coldly composed face of Mrs. Morton, as if he wondered how this could be.

But he did not speak his thoughts.

"Oh! well, you can tell Carter just what you please, you know," he went on. "Women often have a way of getting around a point, better than men. All that's required is for you to marry Carter within three days, and don't let him know anything about what's coming to him until after marriage. Now, then, you understand the case, and of course you will try to score the point which will make you the possessor of enough money to start you to housekeeping nicely," and as if assured what Myra's answer would be, Mr. Gilbert drew a large roll of bank-notes from his pocket.

"Oh! of course, Myra will do everything that's

right," Mrs. Morton declared, her eyes glistening at sight of so much money. "Myra has Carrol fairly snared, and you can rest assured I'll help the matter along all I can."

"Myra will very likely consult her own wishes in this matter," Myra quickly spoke up. "This seems to me like a conspiracy, Mr. Gilbert, and I cannot consent to become a party to it, until I have had time to think. As for my proposing to Carrol Carter, that's out of the question. And it is hardly probable he will propose to me, in the time you have specified. So keep your money. If I conclude to try what you have suggested, I will leave word to that effect before I go to work in the morning. Good-night, sir," and rising, Myra swept from the room, with the haughty carriage of a queen.

Mr. Gilbert smothered an oath and bit his lips from vexation.

Why had he made this most singular proposal?

Why was the proposed match worth a thousand dollars to him?

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE MARRIAGE.

DETECTIVE JIM BEAK picked up his pencil and writing-pad, with a quiet smile of assurance.

"Well," he said, "I have been notably successful in running burglars into custody, and I have scarcely a doubt but what I can handle your case in a way that will be quite satisfactory."

"If so, good! But the offenders are not to be taken into custody without my knowledge and consent."

"Exactly! I understand. Will you now give me some outline of the case, so that I will know how to begin work?"

"Well, sir, I live at No. —, Germantown avenue."

"Yes? Have got it down—know the neighborhood pretty well."

"One point in your favor, then. Night before last my residence was entered, between the hours of seven and eight, and robbed of a valuable document that was locked up in my private secretary, which stands in the front parlor, on the first floor."

"You are sure the robbery occurred between these hours?"

"Positive. We were at dinner at the time. Before dinner I had the paper in my hands, and replaced it in the pigeon-hole, where I usually keep it, and took particular pains to lock the secretary securely on leaving the room."

"On your return to the room, the document was gone, I presume?"

"Yes. On unlocking the desk, I made the discovery that it was gone. I at once questioned all the members of my household, but none of them had been in the parlor since I had been summoned to dinner."

"And no one was in the room when you left it?"

"No."

"The entrance to the room—"

"Is from the hall. There is but one door, which was open."

"How about the windows?"

"There are two. The lower sash was raised enough to admit a pair of wire screens."

"Could these screens have been removed?"

"Yes. But it is not likely any one from the outside would attempt their removal, as they would have to stand on their tiptoes; and then, too, there is a cigar store across the street, outside of which a number of persons are always lounging after six o'clock, and they would have been certain to have seen any one who attempted to get into the house through the window."

"How about the door—the front one?"

"No one can gain entrance there, except by being in possession of a latch-key."

"And the rear?"

"There is a small back-yard, in which a cross dog is always ready to sound an alarm."

"Could any one gain entrance to the house from the roof?"

"No."

"Then it would appear the thief must have had a latch-key, sir?"

"Yes. I do not see how he could have gained entrance without attracting attention, in any other manner."

"Yes? Well, now, let me see. This secretary of yours—has it an ordinary lock?"

"Yes."

"The burglar apparently must have had a key that fitted that, too?"

"Yes."

"Did any of your household have a key to it?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir."

"How many have you in your family?"
 "My family, direct, is composed only of my daughter and myself. Then, I have a housekeeper, an elderly English lady; and two other servants, but they are of unimpeachable character, and have long been in my employ. A personal friend of mine, Mr. Gilbert Guion, has a room in the second story, and gets his meals at the restaurants. He is also above suspicion, being a suitor for my daughter's hand, and a wealthy bachelor."

"This need not necessarily make him above suspicion," Beak said, dryly. "We detectives are not very particular whom we suspect, as long as we eventually get our man. Was Guion in his room at the time of the robbery?"

"No. He never gets in, evenings, until late."
 "What was this document you have lost, sir?"
 Harrington Hurst hesitated, grew red in the face, and was evidently not over anxious to impart this information.

"Must you know this?" he demanded, eying the detective rather distrustfully.

"Certainly!" Beak responded. "I should have a fine time finding the paper, indeed, without knowing what it was."

"So you would! So you would! But—but, you see, it is an important family secret, and I—I don't know—"

"You don't know whether you can trust me or not?"

"Well, I—I—you see—"

"I see," Beak assured. "In seeking a detective's assistance, you haven't the confidence that you can rely on his integrity. Very well, sir. You had better give your case to the police detectives."

"No! no! that would never do, at all. I would rather trust you than them. But, you must promise not to give away what I tell you."

"I very rarely make promises, sir. If what you have to say concerns the case, you can depend upon my silence."

"Ah! that is right. Then, I will tell you how it is. You see, some three months ago, my daughter, a very beautiful girl, (but like all girls not yet having arrived at an age of discretion) contracted a marriage with a young fellow, who had neither profession, social recognition, nor employment. When my daughter showed me the marriage-certificate, you may well believe I was thunderstruck, for I never entertained a suspicion that she would so lower herself, and bring disgrace upon me."

"I had also, by a strong obligation, previously pledged her to another man, and was in duty bound to keep my pledge. So, I was in a bad fix. After having given my daughter a severe lecture, she repented her folly, and I secured the certificate and made pretense to destroy it. Fool I was, that I didn't do it! I placed it in my secretary, and locked it up."

"I then hunted the man my child had married, warned him never to lay claim to my daughter, as there was in fact no marriage, the person who had performed the ceremony—a perambulating minister—having no authority to perform it at all."

"He defied me, and we quarreled. Finally he stated that he would remain in the background for a few months, by which time my daughter would be of age, when he would remarry her in spite of me."

"What are your objections to this match?"

"In the first place, the fellow is poor, and has no occupation; in the second place, my daughter is too far above him, in social station, for me to think of allowing her to live with the worthless beggar, and in the third place, she is promised to another. But this has nothing to do with the burglary."

"That remains to be found out. So this marriage-certificate was stolen and nothing else?"

"Nothing. There were five hundred dollars in the same desk, but it was not touched."

"Your daughter, then, is legally married?"

"Curse it, I am afraid so. But the certificate once more in my hands, it cannot be proved that she ever was married, as the man who tied the knot has disappeared."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No!"

Beak looked at the ex-speculator as if he rather doubted his word.

"What is your daughter's name?"

"Hazel."

"What is her husband's name?"

"The fellow is known as Terrol Taylor. There's no certainty whether that is his right name or not, for his antecedents are very obscure."

"Where does he live?" Beak asked, not betraying the surprise he felt.

"That is hard to tell. He is generally to be found hanging around a saloon at Ninth and Sansom streets."

"Has your daughter ever seen him since her marriage?"

"No, indeed! She has been forbidden to leave the house except in my escort."

"Ah! Has Taylor been in the vicinity?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"What is the name of the man to whom you have promised your daughter?"

"Gilbert Guion, who rooms in my house."

"What is the pay to be in case I find the certificate?"

"You are supposed to know your terms. I will not top at a few dollars as long as I get the document."

"Do you think Terrol Taylor has the paper?"

"How am I to know, or guess? It disappeared so mysteriously that I can form no opinion."

"Perhaps your daughter has possessed herself of it."

"No; she labors under the supposition that I destroyed it immediately after she gave it to me. Then, too, she was in the dining-room when I entered it and still there when I left it."

Then Hazel Hurst, clearly, had had no hand in the theft.

"Does Gilbert Guion know of this marriage?" Beak demanded.

"Why do you ask?"

"For reasons best known to myself. If you want me to handle your case you must answer my questions."

"Yes, he knows about it."

"Does he know Terrol Taylor?"

"He knows of him?"

"Are they on good terms?"

"I don't think they bear any great degree of love for each other. But, why do you ask these singular questions? You understand that the unfortunate marriage of my daughter must not be suspected by any one?"

"Certainly! I am not in the habit of being free with what I hear. This job will cost you five dollars, sir."

"What!"

"Five dollars."

"Why, what in the world do you mean?" and Hurst looked his amazement.

"I said five dollars," Beak answered, calmly, "because that is what it will cost you, in advance, in case I do not find the certificate, which I rather despair of doing."

"And in case you do recover it—?"

"Five hundred!"

"Cheap enough! But, I'll go you still better. Place the original certificate in my hands and I will give you five thousand—do you hear—five thousand!"

"Very well; I will see what I can do for you!"

"But, understand—no one must suspect your game. No one must get a hint of the burglary, or that my Hazel was ever married!"

"I will try and comply with your wishes. One more question. Does Hazel respect Gilbert Guion enough to marry him?"

The retired broker shrugged his shoulders.

"Well—well, she professes not to," he said, "but that's all folderol. She will come to her senses, in time."

And, then, after they had exchanged a few more words, Hurst took his departure.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPIDER'S TRAIL.

AFTER Harrington Hurst had taken his departure, Jim Beak remained in his office for some time, in a deep study.

"Funny case, this," he said, "and I hardly know where to begin on it, dashed if I do. If the old chap hadn't made such a liberal offer, I'd let it go, for something about it don't look on the square."

Hazel Hurst is legally married to a man named Terrol Taylor, but the old man is trying to break the marriage, on the quiet, and then make her marry a man named Gilbert Guion. That would be bigamy outright, no matter whether the certificate is found, or not. The girl is kept literally a prisoner, for fear she will see Taylor. Then, too, the parson who performed the ceremony has disappeared. Humph! this may prove a highly-interesting case, yet. Taylor has been challenged to fight a duel on the beach near Atlantic City, by 'Unknown.' That may have some connection with this case. Plainly, I shall need to find Taylor, and size him up."

He left his office, locking the door behind him. Gazing up and down the street he saw Spider, the newsboy, approaching, whistling, merrily.

"Hillo!" he saluted, as he came up, "what

did old pepper tongue have to say, Jamesy, thet he wer' so purtickler about me?"

"Oh! he intrusted me with a case, that's all."

"Did he? That's good, perwidin' ther's any show in it fer me. What kind of a case was et?"

"A show case," Beak smiled. "Come along with me, Spider. Do you know any of the hang-ers-about up at Ninth and Sansom?"

"Guess I know purty nearly every mug that's fermilyer, 'round them corners, 'specially 'mong ther guys an' hoss-jockeys, an' sports. I take a turn wi' a box, on days o' hoss sales at ther bazaar."

"Good! Did you ever hear of Terrol Taylor, down there—the man that the letter-writer chal-lenged to fight a duel?"

Spider removed his apology of a hat, and scratched his head, thoughtfully.

"Terrol Taylor?" he soliloquized—"let me see. There's Toby Taylor, the old hoss-jockey—an' Jim Taylor, the big policeman—"

"Neither Toby nor Jim, but Terrol Taylor."

"Then, I'm not onter yer man. Hold up—yes I am, too! There's another feller called Taylor, w'at eats at er cheap restaurant, an' then comes an' picks his teeth in front of ther Continental Hotel. Oh! he's a gallus cove; you bet!"

"How do you know his name is Taylor?"

"Heard a couple o' gamblers call his name, from 'cross the street, once, an' he nodded ter 'em."

"Did he join them?"

"No. He kept right on pickin' his teeth."

"Would you know him if you were to see him again?"

"You bet!"

"Then we will saunter up that way. I'd like to see this man."

"Ain't yer goin' ter take me inter partner-ship, Jim?" Yer kno' I've helped you a heap, afore now."

"Oh! I'll use you, never fear."

"But, ain't yer goin' ter put me onter ther racket?"

"Not just now. Time enough for that, by-and-by."

"Dunno 'bout that. Two heads are better'n one, ef one is a sheep's head."

They walked along in silence, until they reached one of the corners of Ninth and Sansom streets, where Spider believed they would find Terrol Taylor.

A number of people usually are collected in the vicinity, some of whom are business or sporting men, and some are idlers of questionable character.

"Well, do you see your man?" asked Beak, after his partner had taken a sharp look about him.

"No, I don't light onter him yet, but he'll be about, before long. He ginerally stands over yonder, where he is conspicerous to all ther women that pass."

"He's a masher, eh?"

"Dunno's he's 'zactly that, for I never see'd him say anything ter any of the girls, but 'pears kinder like ter me as how he's mashed on hisself."

They waited a few minutes longer, and then, leaving Spider to keep watch, Jim Beak sauntered up as far as the post-office, and back.

As he returned a woman was standing at the corner of Ninth and Walnut, below where he left Spider, and Spider was standing before her, evidencing that they were engaged in conversation.

The woman was deeply veiled, and dressed in black, but her pretty figure made it apparent that she was still quite young.

She looked up and down the street, at quick intervals, and appeared to be considerably distressed about something.

Beak halted at Sansom street, refraining from approaching any nearer, but in great curiosity to know what his young pard was saying to her; for Spider was making queer gestures, and evidently working his talking machine, to its fullest capacity.

Finally the woman turned away, and disappeared from view around the corner, Spider hastening back toward his friend.

"Who was that woman?" Beak demanded.

"Dunno. Purty gal, though; could see that through her veil."

"What did she want?"

"She wanted to know which of the wharves 'long the Delaware a person would be the least liable to be seen upon after dark."

"Ha! She means suicide."

"Guess she does, fer she 'peared as nervous as a cat in er tub o' hot water. I axed her what she wanted to know for, and she said she wanted to sit alone and watch the boats on the river. I

told her this was only a 'scuse, an' thet she only wanted ter drown herself. Then she said: 'What! I drown myself? Well, I guess not. I have too much to live for!' Then she laffed so bitter that et made me 'magine I was tastin' a chicken's gall. I finally told her thet if she wanted ter commit suicide, Noble street wharf was the boss place, and et were romantic, too, 'ca'se how more people hed committed suicide from there than any other wharf 'long ther river. Then she fetched up a deep sigh, an' away she went."

Beak gave vent to a low whistle.

"You stay here till you get eyes on the fellow, Taylor, and once you do, don't you lose track of him until to-morrow, unless you find where he lives. Can you do it?"

"Well, I should expect! I've did sech a thing before, an' why can't I do it ag'in? Bet you I can! It will be 'Will ye walk into my parlor, said the Spider to the fly,' when I once get my focus onter his jiblets."

"Very well; I will trust you. See that he has no suspicion that he is followed."

"All right. Where you off to?"

"In pursuit of the would-be suicide."

And Beak hurried away, and soon disappeared.

"Well, here's a go!" Spider soliloquized. "You're in fer another detective racket, Sylvester Spider, but it ain't yer first one. Last time yer got a soaker on the head from old Jake Morgan, w'ot give ye a headache yer won't fer-git very soon. And I'm a hump-backed hoodlum ef I ain't got et in fer Jake. He an' me will hev ter take a walk tergether, one o' these days, and fight it out. 'Spect I better be preparin' fer ther rival o' Mister Terrier Taylor."

The gamin espied a boy younger than himself whom he knew, and giving him money, sent him after a bundle of papers.

In the course of twenty minutes he had a goodly assortment of the evening journals, and his voice rung out clearly as he shouted for their sale.

He moved back and forward about the neighborhood of Ninth and Sanson, taking care not to get so far away but what he would see Taylor in case he put in an appearance.

And Taylor did put in an appearance, sure enough, just before dark—a handsomely-formed young fellow, of good hight and development, and who had a round, pleasant face, light-brown eyes and hair, and a most graceful blonde mustache.

He was dressed in a faultless, tailor-made, light suit, with a white plug hat, stand-up collar, handsome watch-chain and gold-headed cane, and looked less like a dude than a dandy.

He paused near the big hotel entrance, and, as Spider had before made mention, proceeded to pick his teeth with the air of one who had just finished a repast within the hostelry.

"Oh! my eyes, but ain't he layin' it on thick!" chuckled the Spider, as he took a speculative squint at the man he was to shadow. "He makes me sick, he does! He jest feels es big as er canary what's got er new cage, an' I'll bet the last grub he had was pie an' milk—only ten cents. Whoop-la! How my gal Botts would laugh ef she were to twig his jiblets! Botty is a connoisseur on beauty, or she'd never got stuck on me. Wonder how long his bones is goin' ter stand there? Mebbe he'll buy a paper."

And the urchin moved toward Mr. Terrol Taylor, crying:

"'Ere's yer *News, Star, Call* an' *Item*—'ere's yer *Item*, one cent; all 'bout ther prize-fight in ther Twenty-second ward. Paper, mister—one cent."

And he paused, holding out a paper in front of Mr. Taylor invitingly.

"No! I want no paper—get out!" Taylor replied, turning away and walking as far as Chestnut street.

Here he paused a moment, a not very satisfied expression upon his face; then he crossed over to the north side of Chestnut street, and walked slowly westward.

Shouting the sale of his papers, Spider followed on the south side of the street, and had no difficulty in keeping his man in sight, for Taylor did not appear in much of a hurry.

If he was just taking an after-supper stroll, however, it struck Spider it was a long one, for they had finally reached Twentieth street, into which Taylor turned, going north.

"Well, I'll be kicked for a cat!" Spider soliloquized. "I'd jest like to know where the chap is goin'. Ah! I have it—to the park, mebbe. But, who'd think a gallus chap like him would walk way out thar? Mebbe he's broke."

Half an hour later Spider became satisfied that his surmise was correct, for Taylor entered

a pawnbroking establishment on Callowhill street.

After about ten minutes he left the store and continued on his way.

"He's still got his cane. I'll bet he's soaked his watch," Spider said, with a knowing wink. "That kinder makes it look as though he wer' goin' on a racket or else to see his girl, and was in need of some candy cash."

From the pawnbroker's Taylor went direct to the candy store of Mrs. Morton.

Business was dull, and pretty Myra was seated on the doorsteps.

She arose and greeted Taylor with smiles, and then they both sat down together.

Spider saw this much from the corner, but a short distance away, but of course could not hear what was said.

"His jiblets has got a mash," he mused. "This ain't what my pard wants ter know, I reckon. He wants ter know where Terrier Taylor takes off his shoes when he retires to his virtuous couch."

"S'pose I shall have to loaf around heer, till he gits inter motion fer hum-base. No tellin' when that'll be. Ef I c'u'd only git inter a fight wi' some boys et would be some relief ter the monotony."

But the boys of the neighborhood who were of Spider's own size were rather few and far between.

He had sold all his papers, so he had nothing to do but put his hands in his pocket, and whistle—and wait.

He did not have so long to wait as he had anticipated, for he soon saw Taylor and Myra coming out of the narrow street.

The girl had on her hat and they were going to take a walk, evidently.

Spider began to cast about for some place where he would not attract particular attention, fearing that Taylor would recognize him, when an idea struck him, for pulling his hat down so as to shade his face he scratched a ring on the dirty sidewalk, and dropping on his knees, took some marbles from his pocket, and began playing a lone-handed game.

A couple of minutes later, Terrol Taylor and his "mash" came out of the narrow street, and passed the gamin, little suspecting who or what he was.

"Let's go in by the Green street entrance, Carrol," Myra was saying, "and go as far as Lemon Hill. I think it's so pleasant there, of a warm, moonlight night."

"So they are going to the park, eh?" muttered Spider, "an' she calls him *Carrol*. Humph! Carrol—Terrol; Terrol—Carrol. He's a regular cart-hoss fer names. Have to tell Jamesy about that. And I reckon while they're walkin' ter Lemon Hill, I'll jump a keer, ride ter ther Water Works entrance, an' get there a little ahead of 'em. Ef I can git so as tew hear what they've got to say, mebbe I can learn a few p'inters 'bout love, so I can fire 'em at Botts, my gal."

And he suited action to the word. Boarding a Callowhill street car, he was soon at the water works, from where he made his entrance into the park, arriving at the foot of Lemon Hill, full twenty minutes in advance of Taylor and Myra.

The moon sent down a mellow radiance, but there were many dark nooks on the wooded hill, which the moonlight did not penetrate.

And Terrol Taylor, alias Carrol Carter, and Myra wandered to one of these nooks, and found seats upon a settee.

"This is out of the line of general pedestrian travel, and we are not so likely to be overheard," Carrol said.

Little did he suspect that Spider, the newsboy and detective apprentice, lay cuddled up under the very seat on which they sat.

They remained silent for several minutes, as if communing with their own thoughts; then, Taylor finally continued:

"No, Myra, my sweetest, I couldn't meet you when you left the mill to-night, because I had some little matters to attend to, down town—had to wait for something to be finished. You know when I left you, last night, my jewel, I told you I had something to tell you to-night?"

"Yes, Carrol."

"Well, I suppose you may already have guessed what it was—young ladies are so apt at guessing."

"Why, how could I guess? You might have lots of things to tell me about, I am sure."

"But, I haven't. I am a plain matter-of-fact man, who don't indulge in fairy tales, or things like that. What I have to tell you, Myra, is that I love you, passionately, truly, and devo-

tedly, and I want you for my wife. You need not blush, dearest, nor pretend surprise. I feel sure you have known of my affection, for many weeks, and I have been vain enough to believe that my love was in some degree returned. Tell me, my Myra, do you not love me just a little, and will you not make me forever happy, by promising to be my own little wife? Speak to me, Myra, and let me hear you say yes."

And he clasped her passionately in his embrace, and gazed yearningly into her face.

She did not at once attempt to release him, but said in a low voice:

"I have always liked you, Carrol, but this—is unexpected. I—I—"

"What, dearest—tell me!"

"I had not thought of marriage yet—that is, I—I am afraid you would soon regret marrying me. I am but a poor factory girl, and you—"

"What am I? I am poor, also. At present I have no work; but in a few days I expect to spring a surprise upon the public that will make me at least considerable above penury. I cannot tell you what it is, but inside the week I will have money that my own hands and brains have earned, when people looked upon me as an idler. So you see, we will be able to go nicely to housekeeping by ourselves—oh! Myra, just think how happy we could be—that is, if you only love me a tithe as much as I love you."

"I do love you, Carrol. But—"

"I'll stop all 'buts!' he replied, kissing her rapturously.

"But," persisted Myra, "are you sure you don't love any one else—that no other girl has a claim upon your affection?"

"Of course not! What a foolish question to ask! Do you suppose I could love two girls at the same time? No, indeed! You are the only one I love, and you can make me happy. Look! here is the engagement ring with your name already engraved on the inside. See! And now let me place it upon your finger and consider you mine—mine forever!"

There was no answer from Myra, but an audible exchange of kisses satisfied young Spider, sprawled out under the seat, that the ring had been placed on the finger.

"I have not promised yet," Myra said, after a few moments, "and before I do, you must consent to one thing."

"Anything, dearest. You have but to speak."

"You must put your alleged love for me to the test."

"How?"

"By marrying me to-night!"

"To-night, Myra?"

"Yes, to-night!"

"Bless you, my darling! Nothing could please me better than to at once tie the knot that makes you forever mine. But, tell me, why to-night?"

"Just a notion of mine, perhaps. The moon is bright to-night, Carrol, but it may not always be so bright."

And tears filled the poor innocent girl's eyes at the thought, what if this should all be a fitful mocking dream of happiness after all? What if he should not love and be true to her, who now holds her so affectionately in his embrace?"

"There now, don't, dear!" Carrol said, kissing away the tears that rolled down upon her cheeks.

"The moon will ever shine bright for two loving hearts like ours, even tho' we start in life at an humble step in the ladder. Come, love! Your wish shall be mine. Before I leave you at your mother's door, I shall have the right to call you wife."

"No—not to-night, Carrol! I—I was only joking."

"Nonsense, sweetheart! You have given me the notion, and it must be carried out. We will go straight before a magistrate and within an hour you will be Mrs. Carrol Carter, and I will be the happiest fellow the moon ever shone upon."

"Are you sure, Carrol?" doubtfully.

"I would stake my life on it."

They arose then and moved away out of the gloom into the moonlight, Myra leaning upon his arm and looking so joyous and happy, that passers-by turned to gaze after them.

The moon sent down its light upon them as if to betoken them a life of pleasant ways, while the stars twinkled merrily in the blue dome of heaven.

And Mr. Sylvester Spider crawled out from under the settee.

"Well, I'll be kicked for a cat!" was his first mild utterance. "Ef thet weren't a circus, I'm a giraffe! Luv? Lordy massy! thet was luv—ther reg'ler, old heart-bu'stin' kind, five octaves deep! There ain't goin' ter be no time lost neither. Terrier Carrol Taylor believes or

clinchin' nails soon's they're driv'. Don't blame him, neither. Oh! ef I was down in Middle Alley, ter see my gal, Botts, wouldn't I pour ther luv inter her ear, tho'! Bet I would! Botts ain't like Taylor's gal fer good looks, but she's a stavin' good washer, tho', an' s'ports her sick mammy like a man, an' keeps everything clean as wax. Ther only thing I've got ag'in Botts is, she will go barefooted, an' ef her feet keeps on growin', they'll be as big as ther Chicago gals', w'ot you read about in the paper.

"But now, I s'pose I must meander along after Taylor an' his gal, an' see ef they do really git spliced. Ther' won't be no further use o' my trailin' him then, fer he'll most likely put up wi' his mammy-in-law, bein' ignerant an' not posted about 'em. He wears his hair cut cluss—that's one good thing!"

And after them Spider glided, as they wended their way out of the park.

CHAPTER V.

HAZEL.

LET us now follow Jim Beak.

For he felt it his duty to shadow the veiled woman, and see that she did not do harm to herself.

He would have shadowed any woman, of course, under the same circumstances; but there was something else that impelled him to watch over the movements of this veiled woman—some intuition that he was about to make an important discovery.

As he rounded the corner of the theater at Ninth and Walnut, the woman was some distance down the street, and walking rapidly.

Reaching Washington Square, she turned into it, and became seated upon one of the benches.

He also entered the grounds, and took a seat a short distance away from her, and drawing a paper, Beak pretended to read by the light of the gas lamp above him.

Her movements upon the settee showed that she was nervous and excited, and she several times buried her face momentarily in her hands.

"She is either off her mental base, or else she wants to get rid of herself, and don't know whether to try it or not."

At first the detective was tempted to go forward and inquire as to the cause of her apparent distress, but a second thought warned him not to. She would most likely repulse him, or else be frightened, and he would find it a harder matter to follow her.

So he sat still and waited.

The moon came up, and cast its early beams down into the square, at sight of which she appeared to give a start.

She looked quickly around her; then rising, left the square on the Walnut street side, and walking down to Fifth street boarded a car, going north.

There happened to be another car close in the rear of this, and Beak took this and the chase continued, without much opportunity thus far for her to be suspicious of pursuit.

He could see from the front window of the rear car where and when she got off.

At Noble street the car stopped and let her out, and she lost no time in hurrying eastward toward the river.

Part of the way, as she neared the river, the lamp-lights were few and far between, and the surroundings of anything but a refined character.

But she seemed to pay no attention to them, nor to those whom she met and passed.

When she at length reached Delaware avenue, she halted and looked up and down the street.

Business generally is suspended on this thoroughfare at an early hour of the evening, and being in the wholesale quarter, the close of business leaves the street deserted, with the exception of the river-front police, and now and then some belated or straggling pedestrian.

The policeman was moving away toward the other end of his beat, when the woman reached the avenue, across which, and before her, on the river front, was Noble street wharf, a place of no little notoriety of late years, on account of the numerous suicides that have been committed there by drowning.

A private watchman generally does duty along the wharves of the neighborhood, but even he was nowhere to be seen just then.

So the woman glided across the street and out upon the wharf, which was empty of freightage, with the exception of a couple of empty fruit-crates.

Carrying one of these to the front of the

wharf, the woman sat down upon it and gazed steadily into the dark, flowing waters, they appearing to have a strange fascination for her.

Even the blowing of the whistles and clanging of the bells of the ferryboats, that moved to and fro across the river, appeared not to attract her attention.

"How cold and pitiless the waters look!" she said aloud after a few moments. "As they lap against the wharf, they seem to laugh at my misery. Oh, God! why was I ever born, to endure this torture? This cruel, cruel letter—oh! I cannot live and know he loves another!"

She clinched in her grasp a crumpled letter, as if she were afraid it would escape her; then, by sudden impulse, and with a reckless laugh, she attempted to throw it into the river.

The wind caught it up and blew it back over her shoulder, however, a fact that she appeared entirely unmindful of.

"Yes; he does love another, for he wrote me so, and stated his surprise that I had any affection for him more than passing friendship. He appears even to forget—but, my God! perhaps he even does not suspect the truth, does not know that I have a claim upon him, stronger than any one else would have! I have never seen him, since that night—he may not know that a—a certificate was handed me. Oh! Heaven, and that too is destroyed—lost—lost—and I am powerless to save him—powerless to prevent a living crime! Oh! I cannot—I cannot endure it. I will end my miserable life at once, and may God in his mercy forgive me!"

She arose with a wailing cry, and no doubt would have plunged into the river, but a firm grasp seized her shoulder, and wheeled her partly around.

"Stop, madam!" the stern voice of Jim Beak ordered. "No more suicides from this wharf, when I'm about."

She trembled violently, and tried to free herself, but there was no breaking from Beak's grasp.

"Let me go—oh! let me go!" she pleaded faintly. "Oh! sir, I do not want to live any longer, so let me go—please let me go, sir!"

"I'll do nothing of the kind, and if you don't quiet down and act sensible, I'll walk you off to the station-house."

"Oh! no—no! do not do that, I beg of you."

"Then come along with me, and as we go, tell me what is your name, and what is your trouble. I am a detective, and perhaps I can help you."

"A detective? Oh! you were not sent by—by my father I hope?"

"No! I followed you simply because you were bent on taking your life. Tell me your name."

"Oh! no; I cannot go home again, and if I cannot die, I must never use my own name again, for they would find me—the officers—and take me home."

"And why can you not go home?"

"I wouldn't dare, sir. Father is very stern, and he would scold me terribly."

"Indeed, he ought! You were very foolish in attempting to take your own life, my dear lady. But, I overheard what you said, while on the wharf, and know you have some great trouble. We will go to a public square, sit down, and you must make me your confidant of every particular, and I will do all in my power to prove myself your friend; for you are young and beautiful, and I believe I can tell you your name."

"Indeed, sir, you are very kind; but how should you be able to guess my name?"

"Because the letter you threw away, floated back into my hands. You are Hazel Hurst."

"Yes, but oh! sir, you will not betray me, I beg and pray of you?"

"Indeed no! We will go to the square, and you can tell me all your trouble, and depend on it I will be your friend. I know your father, and his daughter shall not find me less than a friend. Come."

"No! no! Not to a public square. I might be seen and recognized, there."

"Then, to my office, where you can go with perfect propriety, and without hesitation."

"Then, there, if anywhere. I must unburden my mind, or I shall go crazy!"

So, they set out at once, for Beak's office, going the greater part of the way by street car.

In less than an hour's time they were seated in the detective's apartment, with a table between, and Beak with his pencil and pad in hand, ready for jotting down Hazel's story.

"How do you come to know my father, sir?" Hazel asked, when he had signified his readiness to hear her.

"He called upon me this afternoon, to engage my services."

"Ha!—to hunt up an important document, which he claimed had been stolen from him?"

"Yes. Do you know what it was?"

"No. He merely said it was an important document. But go on with your story. We will talk about the document afterward. What put the notion of suicide into your head?"

"I was wild with despair, and grief," Miss Hurst said, raising her veil, and revealing her face, "and did not care to live. But you will not understand, until I tell you all."

"At a social gathering, some months ago, I met a young gentleman of prepossessing appearance, named Terrol Taylor, and he was so courteous to me that he won my love, then and there, and through my invitation, we met at parties frequently thereafter, and I grew to worship him, and was blind enough to believe that my girlish affection was reciprocated. I never invited him home, for he had told me he was poor, and I knew my haughty father would pry into his affairs, and then forbid me to see him. So we met only at social gatherings, and I loved him as I can never love another man."

"Finally, one night we were at a champagne party, and there were games, and such things, when it was finally proposed to have a mock marriage. Every one hailed the idea with delight, and I was selected as the bride-elect, and a number of the company coaxed Terrol to act as the groom. I do not think any one in the room had any idea that it was more than a farce—I know I did not. So a gentleman, a stranger to me, married us, and we were laughingly congratulated."

"Later in the evening, Terrol received a telegram summoning him away, and I have never seen him since. After he had gone, the gentleman who had married us, appeared and handed me a paper, saying:

"There, Mrs. Taylor, is your certificate, and allow me to wish you much joy."

"I took it, laughingly, never suspecting it was legal, until my father came, later in the evening. He heard of the marriage, and coming to me, said we would go home, at once. I then began to suspect the truth, and was not sorry—no! I was happy to believe it was true that Terrol Taylor was really my husband."

"When we arrived home, father told me the marriage was valid, and I was the wife of a pauper, and oh! sir, he went on at a fearful rate. He told me he had pledged me to a man, I detest, one Gilbert Guion. He, then, forced me to give up the certificate, and afterward told me he had burned it. I told him I would never give up my husband, but he swore if I didn't and didn't marry Gilbert Guion, I would end my days in an insane asylum. Oh! he is a terrible man, even though he is my father. I have not been permitted to step out of doors since then, until this afternoon, when I escaped."

"A few days ago, I wrote to Terrol, that if he had any love for me at all, he would give some exhibition of it, by calling to see me. In reply—oh! God, he wrote back that he did not love me, and was surprised that I should suppose he did, as he had never given me any cause to; that his acquaintance had simply been of friendship, and, in conclusion, said he loved and soon hoped to wed a girl of an humble station in life. Oh! sir, that letter nearly killed me, for I loved him so, and all the world looked cold and cheerless to me, and I resolved to put an end to my unhappiness, by drowning."

"Terrol said plainly enough in the letter, that he loved another instead of me, and yet, as long as I lived, he could not legally, or honorably marry her. So, that he may be happy—he whom I love much better than life itself, I was willing to commit suicide. Oh! sir, you were cruel to interfere, when I was prepared."

And burying her face in her hands, Hazel Hurst wept, bitterly.

Jim Beak, detective, not accustomed to such scenes as this, felt rather uncrved.

"Pray, do not cry, Miss Hurst," he said, gently. "Be calm, and let us see what we can do in this most unfortunate case. Taylor is not already married to this girl?"

"Oh! sir, I do not know—I do not. All that I know is that he is mine, and I love him, and cannot live to endure the thought that he is the husband of another," she sobbed.

"Well, I'll see Taylor and knock this matter in the head. If he is your husband, and the certificate can be found, I'll guarantee he will not marry girl number two, quite yet!"

"If the certificate can be found?" Hazel gasped. "Why—"

"Listen. Your father never destroyed the certificate, but kept it locked in his private secretary."

"Thank God!"

"According to his statement, the certificate

was stolen, and he offers me five thousand dollars to recover it. Although it is a delicate job, I shall undertake it. If I get the certificate, I shall think long thoughts before I let it go out of my hands."

"Oh! God bless you, sir! You can never know what hope and relief your words give me. If father was to get hold of the certificate again, he would surely destroy it."

"I know he would. But does he know that even then, he could not break the validity of your marriage, providing it is valid?"

"Oh! it is valid, sir. I haven't a doubt about that. The man who married us is a regularly ordained minister of the gospel, it appears."

"But, if so, what was he doing at the champagne party?"

"He was on a visit to a friend in the house, who got him to perform the ceremony without knowing that he had been recently ordained."

"This is a bad piece of business, all around," Beak said, with a dubious shake of his head. "What is the minister's name?"

"Reverend Timothy Binks."

"Where did this ceremony take place?"

"No. — Montgomery avenue!"

"Is Binks still there?"

"Papa told me he had left, and no one knew of his whereabouts."

"Where does Terrol Taylor live?"

"He boards at No. — Oxford street."

"And, now, about this Guion—who is he?"

"He is an old bachelor, and reputed to be very wealthy. He has a room at father's house."

"You do not like him?"

"I detest him, sir! He is at heart a villain. He would marry me to-day, knowing it to be bigamy, were I to countenance his suit."

"And would your father wink at such a marriage as that?"

"Not unless forced to, sir."

"Ah! then there is force in the matter, eh?"

"Yes. Gilbert Guion holds some mysterious power over my father, concerning something that is of the past, by exercising which he can bend my father to his will. My father is a strong-willed man, but his will is weak and useless when Guion is about, and he would do anything rather than incur Guion's wrath. You may know that, when he swore he would have me shut up in an insane asylum if I refused to marry Guion, as soon as he procured a divorce!"

"Ah! a divorce?"

"Yes."

"I took it from what he said to me that your marriage must be kept quiet. He could not well get a divorce without publicity."

"You are wrong there. My father has a great deal of money, and he told me he could buy a divorce without the least publicity. As for Terrol, he said he could buy him off and send him to the Antipodes."

"And in case you were free would you marry Guion?"

"Never! As I told you, there is but one man on earth I love, and he is my husband. If I could have him I would ask for nothing else."

"Well, we will see if we can't arrange matters. Do you think Taylor knows that you are really legally married? I should think if he did he would hesitate about winning another girl for his wife."

"Since you mention it, perhaps it may be so. I know he did not seem to regard it as a marriage up to the time he left the party, and unless he has learned about it since, he does not know that a marriage-certificate was given me."

"Then the chances are large that he does not know that there is any impediment in his marrying this other girl."

"Oh! sir, if that should be the case, do not tell him to destroy his happiness. I will bear all my suffering in silence, rather than mar his happiness. I will even sacrifice myself to—death—for his sake."

"You are a noble-hearted girl, Miss Hurst, but such a thing as you propose must not be. Taylor must know the truth, and then act according to his convictions. I do not think he has the certificate, and so shall have to seek in another direction. And now you had better let me see you to the vicinity of your home, and, above all, give up all thought of suicide."

"No! no! I will not go home. Father would accuse me of being out to see Terrol, and would raise a terrible fuss. No, I have money of my own which I brought with me, and I will seek some small respectable hotel for the present, and register under an assumed name. I will never go home until father promises to cut loose from that villain Gilbert Guion. And I want you to be my

friend, sir, for I have no one else to look to in this hour of trouble."

"You can rest assured of my friendship," Beak answered warmly; "and perhaps your plan of remaining away from home for a time, until matters are cleared up, is best. I shall give my time and attention to this case in your behalf, and if Guion turns out the villain you believe him, I will try to unmask him, and throw off this power he holds over your father."

"Oh! you are so very kind. And you will let no one know where I am? I know of a quiet boarding hotel that will just suit me. If you will take me there—"

"With pleasure. I shall then be able to communicate with you when necessary."

"Yes. And now you must not do so much for me all for nothing. Here are a hundred dollars. Take the money, and when you need more you shall have it."

"But, Miss Hurst—"

"It's all right. I have more than that. My pin-money in past years I have been quite saving of, as papa was indulgent to me, and when I came to count it up to-day I found it amounted to a considerable sum. So, make no hesitation of taking that, and ask for more when you need it."

"I will accept it, Miss Hurst, on the condition to do all in my power to clear away the clouds that hover over your life. I hope to see you your happy self once more."

"I fear that can never be, for my life is blighted, and even though Terrol does not marry the other girl, I could not ask him to live with me, when he said in his letter he did not love me. Oh, God! why was I ever born?"

And she buried her face in her handkerchief, once more weeping piteously.

"There, there, do not cry, dear lady. Perhaps it's all for the best," Beak said, going around to her and laying his hand upon her shoulder. "Perhaps you will yet meet some one you will love better. And now, come, please! Let me accompany you to the hotel."

With an effort she dried her tears and arose, and they left the office.

A man stood upon the curbstone as they did so, and was gazing straight at them.

At sight of him, Hazel uttered a little cry of horror, and clutched Beak's arm for support.

"Merciful Heaven! It is Gilbert Guion!" she gasped.

CHAPTER VI.

BOTTS.

"YER may kick me fer a cat ef I wouldn't like ter have had Jamesy Beak 'long wi' me to heerd thet luv-makin'," soliloquized the Spider, as he dogged the footsteps of Carrol Carter and Myra out of the park. "Jim he's kinder of a skeptic 'bout women folks an' love matters, an' et would do me good ter see sum gal git him in love so bad he couldn't wiggle his right ear any more an' say women were 'N. G.'"

"I don't think so. I'll jest go a quid o' perlice plug ag'in' a organ-grinder's monkey thet my gal Botts will make a boss wife. An' ef she don't git stuck on some other better-lukin' feller'n I, thet chances are big we'll git spliced one o' these days, when Botts outgrows her habit o' goin' 'round bare-footed. S'pose, in fact, I an' Botts orter git married now, so I could help her support her sick mother. Kinder funny, never seed the old lady but once sence I know'd Botts, an' then she was pale and thin, and looked purty sick. She looked, too, as if she had seen better days. Botts never tells me nothin' 'bout their past, either. One thing is sure: soon's I'm through wi' this racket, I must go an' give Botts another course o' lessons in love-makin', or she will fergit all I ever did tell her, a-settin' on McKinney's cellar-door."

Carrol and Myra left the park and immediately sought the nearest magistrate's office, which was not many blocks distant.

Spider was close at hand when they entered, and, by peering in, had the satisfaction of seeing the ceremony performed, although he could not catch the words that were uttered.

Finally, armed with their certificate, they left the office and started for Myra's home.

Spider did not follow them.

"They're married," he said, "and 'tain't no use o' my doggin' 'em any more. Let 'em go, an' I'll shindy down to Middle Alley an' see 'f I kin ketch Bottsy up."

Most Philadelphians know where Middle Alley is, or have heard of it, and those who have not need not want to, for it is by no means the grandest thoroughfare in the city.

Indeed, vice and squalor are here, true and tried partners.

But, to Spider, Middle Alley had all the attractions of Broadway, simply because "his girl Botts" lived in one of the humble habitations that flanked either side of the alley.

The house that she lived in was not a tenement, like the others, but was a narrow, story-and-a-half structure, containing three rooms, which the Botts family occupied all by themselves.

When Spider arrived at this house, he found "his girl" seated on the doorstep much to his joy.

The alley swarmed with people of rough and ugly types, and various nationalities, but Botts, as she was generally known, was an American, and quite attractive looking.

She was sixteen years of age, had a round, intelligent face, sparkling brown eyes, and a wealth of hair of like color, which fell in glossy waves over her shoulders.

She wore a pretty chintz dress, and notwithstanding Spider's previous allusions to the contrary, wore a pair of brand new kid shoes, which peeped out from under her dress.

The young detective paused, and surveyed her from top to toe, in pure astonishment, and then ruefully contemplated his own shabby attire.

"Well, I'll be kicked fer a cat!" he ejaculated. "What on earth has happened? Have you struck a fortune, or hev you been tryin' yer hand at a fire in a shoe store?"

"Neither," was the airy reply of Miss Botts. "Why?—do you see anything green in my eye, Spider?"

"No, but I see suthin' black on your feet, that looks mighty out o' place there. Where'd yer strike the shoes, an' the togs? I didn't see no signs o' a fire, when I cum down."

"Oh! dry up! Come and sit down here, beside me, and I'll tell you."

"What! me sit down 'longside o' them togs? Nixee!"

"Oh! come along! This is nothing but a cheap dress. I intend to wear satin and velvet, before long. But come, or I won't ever speak to you—there, now!"

"Oh! I'll come!" Spider said, yielding to the persuasion, "but 'pears like I was in an atmosphere o' hevving. Say, come, now, tell us all about it."

"Of course I will. Don't I tell you everything, Spider? Well, you see I've got a job—struck a bonanza!"

"A job?—a bonanza? What ye drivin' at?"

"I ain't goin' to take in washin' any more, for a living. I've got an engagement to go nurse a real old man, in a big grand house, with handsome carpets and furniture, what ain't going to live very long."

"Which—the furniture and carpets, or the old man?"

"Why, the old man, of course! Oh! he's awful old, and he's awful rich, and I'm to have sole charge of the house, except an old negress, who does the cooking. Oh! won't I have it grand, though?"

"Spect you will. But, how about your mother?"

"Oh! she is feeling a good bit stronger, and as we shall have plenty of money, she can have her meals brought from the restaurant on the corner, and Mrs. McGraw will keep the house clean. Then too, I can come home, twice a week. Just think of it, only—fifty dollars a week!"

Spider burst into a roar of laughter.

"Come, now, cheese that! W'ot yer givin' us, I say? D'ye think I'm a reg'lar slow that calls horseshoes epaulettes?"

"I know you ain't, Spider, but I'm telling you the truth. Fifty dollars a week, and I've got the first week's pay, in advance. I'm tellin' you the solid truth as sure as my name ain't Rip Van Winkle."

"I hope you are, Botts, but it kinder looks to me as ef you aire drawin' it purty strong. What old snoozer would be green enough ter pay so much when one kin git dead loads o' gals fer three dollars? But say, how'd you come ter strike et?"

"Well, you see, there's a gentleman that used to know mother some years ago, and he hunted us up, and to help us along offered me the position. The old man whom I am going to nurse is his grandfather, and is expected to die pretty soon of old age, and needs some one to watch over him. As the grandson cannot be with him all the time, he is willing to pay well for a nurse, an' so help us along, as he's well able to do."

"What's the grandson's name?"

"Gilbert Guion."

"And the old man's name?"

"Christopher Guion."

"Where does he live?"

"Number — on C — street, West Philadelphia. Oh! it's a nice place, Mr. Gilbert says, and I'll like it ever so much. Just think of it! we will be rich in a short time!"

"Y-a-s," drawled Spider—"that is, if the old man don't shuffle off within a couple of hundred years. I wish his nibs, Gilbert Guion, had left you alone and got some other girl, dash him!"

"Oh! why, Spider?"

"'Cause I'll have to go hunt up some other mash."

Botts laughed merrily.

"Oh! no you won't, Spider. You must come out to where I live to see me—why, of course you must. And I'll receive you in the best parlor, and—oh! it will be so nice! It will seem just like I was some grand lady, don't you see?"

"And I'll be a grand gentleman, I suppose?" looking down scornfully at his ragged trousers.

"Why, of course!"

"Then, one thing's settled—I've got to tackle some misfit store, and git togged up better'n I am now. Me an' Beak is enter another case, an' mebbe we'll make a boodle out o' that. But, looker here! you won't git stuck up an' go ter mashin' enter other fellers, will ye?"

"Not a bit of it! You and I are steady company, ain't we, an' what do I want of another feller?"

"That's so. Well, take care o' yerself, an' don't fall in love with the old man. Soon as I kin rake up some better togs I'll come out an' see you."

And giving the willing girl a parting kiss, Spider took his departure.

The hour was not yet very late, and something impelled him to walk down to Jim Beak's office and see if the detective was not about, for he was not in the habit of leaving his office usually until near midnight.

So he jogged along, whistling as he went, and little expecting what sort of a scene he was destined soon to run upon.

That portion of Spruce street where Beak's office was located was built up of imposing rows of dwellings, and after nine o'clock at night the staid Quaker residents were for the most part in bed and asleep, and the street deserted, except for an occasional car or some straggling pedestrian.

Beak's office was near the corner of a transverse street, and was the only "one-horse" edifice in the neighborhood.

As, on a proaching the office, Spider rounded the corner, his gaze beheld a scene that caused him to utter an exclamation of surprise.

Two men had clinched in a struggle, and were waltzing about the sidewalk at a lively rate.

Near at hand stood a woman dressed in black, whose hands were clasped, and who was evidently greatly distressed.

It did not take Spider more than a minute to learn that one of the men was his pard, Jim Beak; he also recognized the woman as the one who had accosted him earlier in the day.

"Hillo! here's a go!" he soliloquized. "Wonder who the chap is what Beak is wrestling with? They're purty near mated, but I guess I had better part 'em afore a cop comes along and waltzes 'em off to the station-house," and darting forward, and ducking his head, the gamin managed to work himself between the contestants' legs.

The result was that they tripped, and all went tumbling to the pavement in a heap, the clinch being broken.

Gilbert Guion was the first to regain his feet, and without uttering a word, he took to his heels and disappeared from view around the corner.

When Beak and Spider more deliberately arose, Guion had made good his exit.

"Well, I'll be kicked fer a cat ef the feller ain't slid!" Spider ejaculated. "Golly, what a coward! He ain't got no more sand nor a pink-eyed pertater. Who is he, Jamesy?"

"It don't matter just now," Beak replied, grimly. "I'll fix him one of these days. Have you got any news of importance, boy?"

"Bet I have—dead loads of it!"

"Then wait here until I conduct this young lady to a place of safety. I won't be long."

And Beak and Hazel Hurst walked rapidly away.

"Hi! my heyes!" mused Spider. "Beaky must o' saved the gal from committin' suicide. An' I'll bet he gits stuck on her, fer all he don't take ter females. Wonder who she is, anyhow?"

But he was destined to be left to wonder until the detective's return.

Let us follow the latter and his fair charge.

"Oh! sir, this is most unfortunate that Gilbert Guion should find me with you!" Hazel said, as they hurried along. "He will tell my father, and then—oh! dear, there's no knowing what will happen!"

"It is rather unfortunate, as you say, Miss Hurst, but the rascal found he could not take you away from me, and I fancy he will fight shy of me in the future, as he is evidently an arrant coward."

"But will he not find me?"

"I think not. At the hotel where we are going you will be safe under an assumed name, unless you expose your face upon the street. I will watch well to your interests, and warn you in case of danger."

"You are very kind, sir. How can I ever hope to repay you?"

"You can repay me by letting me manage this unfortunate affair until I can bring about some good result, which I think I can."

They reached the quiet boarding hotel in good time and accommodations were secured for Hazel, she registering under the name of Amy Alden.

Beak then bade her good-by, and hurried back to his office, where he found Spider waiting for him on the doorstep.

They entered the room, locked the door after them, lit the gas and then became seated, with the table between them.

"Now, boy," Beak said, lighting a cigar, "I find that I shall want to use you, and I suppose I can put the same dependence in you that I have been able to do several times in the past."

"Reckon ye kin tie to me like a hoss to a fire-engine! Yer orter know what sort o' a chap I am by now."

"You have always panned out well, and I hope you always will. Now, listen, and I will give you a distinct outline of the case I have in hand. Pay strict attention, and commit to memory what I tell you, for you may need to remember it as our case progresses."

Beak then related all about Harrington Hurst's business with him; also what he had learned from Hazel Hurst, and all else thus far that he knew himself.

Spider listened attentively, his dirty face at times manifesting no little surprise, and he was evidently eager to have his partner finish.

"And, now, you see," Beak said, in conclusion, "it appears that Terrol Taylor is really the husband of Hazel Hurst, and yet, according to his own letter, he does not love her, but proposes to marry another girl. This must be stopped."

"It is too late, boss!"

"What?"

"Too late, jest as I tell you. The fellar's gone and did it, and did et up brown, too. I see'd et done!"

"Good Heaven! Go on and explain!" Beak ordered, excitedly. "If this be true, things are indeed in a pretty mess!"

"Well, you see," Spider proceeded, "after you went off on a chase after the woman, Taylor, he come along, picked his teeth a while at ther Continental door, an' then took a walk 'way up-town. I managed to foller him, tho', an' at last he squatted down on a doorstep, in a narrow street, alongside a pretty gal."

"Ah!"

"Yas. They 'peared like they were pritty fond of each other, an' finally the gal put on her hat, an' they come out o' the street, an' I heerd 'em mention 'bout goin' to Lemon Hill. So you bet I slid out lively, and got thar ahead of 'em, an' got right under ther very seat they sot down on."

"Go on!" excitedly.

"Well, they hadn't sot there long before they began makin' love, an' thar I lay, takin' et all in. Oh! I tell you, it was sweet—reg'lar old yeller-jack candy sweet, an' don't yer fergit et. Ef you'd just 'a' been there, you'd not live old bachelor life another week. Finally, Taylor he axed her ef she would have him, an' they struck up a bargain, the conditions bein' that he should marry her to-night, while there was a fust-class moon."

"Indeed! Did the young woman maket his proposition?"

"Yes. She made ther prop, an' he tuck et up, and they started at once for the magistrate's office. I follered 'em, and peeked thru the windy, an' see'd the knot tied; then I let 'em go, while I slid down inter Middle Alley to see my gal, Botts. By ther way, Botts has struck et rich—awful!"

"She has?"

"Yes. She's got a job o' nussin' an old cove, for fifty dollars a week, up in West Phila."

"Nonsense!"

"But I say she has. She's even got her first week's wages in advance."

"Indeed! How did she come to strike such a position as that? Why, professional and experienced nurses don't often get that much!"

"Can't help that. Bottsy has got the persuasion. Some guy as knows Mrs. Botts got it fer her. He was the old man's grandson, I believe. Say, come ter think, his name is same as that you mentioned—Gilbert Guion."

"Gilbert Guion? Can it be possible?"

"Yes; you bet that's jest ther size of et, Jamesy. Ther chap you was wrastlin' with is ther very chump w'ot's ter give Bottsy fifty a week fer nussin' his granddaddy."

"There is something queer about this—quite a coincidence that his name should come to me so suddenly, twice in twenty-four hours," Beak said, thoughtfully. "Miss Hurst pronounces him a villain, and I've no doubt but what he is, since he tried to get her away from me by attempting to knock me down. I shall have to investigate his case, for it occurs to me that he is about the only person who may have the stolen certificate."

"Like enough. I shall tell my gal Botts about him."

"Tell her nothing, except that I said for her to make it her business to overhear all she possibly can of what passes between the grandfather and grandson."

"I see! make her a kind of a detective, too?"

"Exactly."

"I'll do et, an' you bet Bottsy will do almost anything for me. But, how about this feller, Taylor?"

Beak's brows became knitted in a look of perplexity.

"I hardly know what to do, or what to think about the matter," he said. "In marrying this second girl, Taylor has certainly committed bigamy. Perhaps he has done so, in ignorance that his other marriage was valid, and it would seem a shame to make him and his new bride unhappy, by breaking the bad news to them. Yet, something must be done, and I shall try to see him, to-morrow."

"And, what shall I do?"

"Why, you will hold yourself in readiness at a moment's notice. Be here, early, to-morrow, and I may have other orders to give you."

And Jim Beak and his little pal parted for the night.

CHAPTER VII.

GUION SHOWS HIS TEETH.

As the reader has no doubt inferred, the Mr. Gilbert who made the remarkable offer, to Myra Morton, as narrated in a previous chapter, and the Gilbert Guion whom we have since alluded to, were one and the same person.

When he left the vicinity of his struggle with Detective Jim Beak, he lost no time in making his way to the Broad street railway station. There he took a coupe, and after giving a few directions, was driven rapidly to the residence of Harrington Hurst, on Germantown avenue.

It was a handsome brick house, with marble trimmed front, and steps, and inside blinds; but no lights were visible from the front part of the residence, when Guion got out of the coupe.

Paying the driver, he entered the house, by the aid of a latch-key.

Once within the hall, he found it lighted, as was the elegantly furnished parlor, in which Mr. Hurst was seated at his secretary, engaged in writing.

"May I come in?" Guion asked, pausing at the threshold, hat in hand.

"Yes, come in, and have a chair," the speculator replied, rather gruffly. "I am not particularly occupied. Any news, down-town?"

"None in particular," Guion replied, as he helped himself to an easy-chair, "except I hear a rumor that there will be a run on the — Bank, to-morrow."

Hurst shrugged his shoulders, and gave vent to a grunt.

"Thank goodness no bank's failure, will affect me," he said, with a glance at a large safe, near at hand.

"I've closed up all my banking business, and got my money where no one will handle it but myself."

"And a goodly pile, I dare say, you have of it. However, what is money? It cannot always buy happiness, nor can it buy off a haunting phantom, nor return a life!"

"Enough of that!—enough of it, I say!" Hurst cried, stamping the floor, and growing red in

the face. "If you have come here for *that* you can leave."

"I shall undoubtedly choose my time about doing that," was the cool retort. "There's no use of your getting mad at me, Harrington, for you know you'll have to cool right down again. Where is Hazel?"

"In her room, I suppose."

"You only *suppose*, then? Do you not know that she is there?"

"Of course, she is there."

"Of course she is *not* there!"

"What are you talking about? Who said she was not in her room?"

"I say so. I saw her less than half an hour ago, on Spruce street, just emerging from an office, in company with a man!"

"You are an accursed liar!" Hurst cried, springing to his feet, furious with rage. "What do you mean, sir?"

"Sit down!" Guion ordered, sternly. "What I am telling is true. If you do not believe it, ascertain if she is in her room or not. I am well satisfied that she is not."

The speculator touched an electric button in the wall, near his desk, and in a few minutes the housekeeper entered the room.

"Is my daughter in her room?" Harrington Hurst demanded, sternly.

"I believe she is, sir. She complained of a headache, this afternoon, and directed that she should not be disturbed, unless she rung."

"Ah! go to her room, at once, and see if she is there."

The housekeeper departed, but soon returned, looking decidedly alarmed, for she had been ordered to see that Hazel did not escape from the house.

"I rapped, sir, but got no answer," she announced. "The door is locked, too."

A quiet laugh broke from Guion's lips, as, with a furious curse, Hurst arose, and hastened from the room, followed by the housekeeper.

"The old man will go wild, now, and tear his hair," Guion soliloquized, puffing away at his cigar. "But, what care I? The time is pretty near for me to force matters, and if I can't win my game one way, I can another. Win I certainly shall, and so, after all, my planning has not been for nothing."

Hurst soon returned to the parlor in high dudgeon.

"She is gone, sure enough," he declared. "Quick! tell me where you saw her."

"On Spruce, as I said."

"Whereabouts on Spruce street?"

"Coming out of the shop of the man you visited this afternoon—Jim Beak, the detective."

"Ha! what can have taken her there? Who was with her?"

"Beak, himself. I first saw them coming from the direction of the river, and followed them. They went to Beak's office, and were closeted for some time, I awaiting on the outside. After awhile they came out, and I demanded of Beak that he deliver Miss Hazel to my custody, when he pitched onto me and we had a tussle. I finally broke away—and here I am."

"Fool! Why did you not follow them?"

"Because I was not armed."

At this juncture the housekeeper entered.

"If you please, sir, here is a note I found in the young lady's room, sir," and she handed it to the ex-speculator.

A snarl of anger and disgust burst from him as he glanced it over; then he read aloud, as follows:

"DEAR FATHER:—

"I have grown heartily tired and sick of being shut up in the house. It is an unendurable persecution. You know I love my husband, and I have told you I would never! never! marry Gilbert Guion. I despise and loathe him. I am going out now, and perhaps shall put an end to all this trouble by drowning myself in the Delaware. At all events, I shall never return to the shelter of your roof until you cast out that viper, Gilbert Guion, whose only desire to marry me arises from the hope that he may be able to get hold of a part or the whole of your fortune. I have a daughter's affection for you, but the viper is forcing you to act beyond the bounds of your authority, and make me the victim of his evil designs. I will not submit, so escape, now, ere it is too late."

Hazel."

"Curse her!" Guion gritted, under his breath. "I could kill her for writing that."

Aloud, he said:

"A very pretty letter to come from one as refined and intelligent as your daughter. I will leave it to you if it is not, friend Hurst?"

"Confound it, man, I can't blame her. She don't like you any better than I do."

"Maybe not. But that shall make no difference. The fact is, Hurst, I'm heartily tired and

sick of this dilly-dallying, and have made up my mind not to stand any more of it. That girl must be found, and *must* marry me inside of three days, or you will give the sheriff another job."

"Curse you! curse you, inhuman wretch that you are! You well know that I am no more guilty of such a crime than a new-born babe. Curse you, I say! You would drive me to sacrifice my daughter to screen an act I never did. Oh, you devil! Your time will come to pay up for this blackmail—this infernal, damnable blackmail!"

"You mean *your* time will come mighty quick, unless you behave yourself. Supposing that Jim Beak, the detective, were to know that you foully murdered your wife—"

With a cry of fury Hurst leaped toward his accuser, as if he would annihilate him.

But Guion slipped out of his chair and eluded him.

"Curse you, will you shut up?" Hurst gasped. "How do you know but what some one overheard your words?"

"Bah! what of it? The whole matter is bound to come out anyhow, if you refuse to come to my terms, and that, too, without delay."

"I have not refused to come to your terms; but God in Heaven knows I am not guilty. Why, then, does He permit this human fiend to persecute me?" and throwing himself upon a sofa, the man of riches buried his face in his hands and shook with emotion, that appeared to be genuine.

"Come, come, no more of that!" Guion said, fiercely. "It won't work. You're not the man to make a baby of yourself. You know I hold the proofs against you, and am not a man to trifle with; so be sensible. Do as I have ordered, and all will be well."

"But, how can I marry you to my daughter, man, when she will not consent?"

"Make her consent!"

"I cannot."

"You can. You have never been explicit enough. Do you suppose if she knew your life depended upon it, she would refuse? No! no! Give her credit for more sense than that!"

"But it would be no marriage. It would be bigamy, to which you would both be knowing parties."

"Nonsense! Within three days I will be prepared to furnish proofs that Terrol Taylor is dead, and your daughter free to contract a legal marriage."

"Bah!"

"You do not believe it?"

"No, of course I don't!"

"Nevertheless it will be as I have said. The proofs will be ample. So now all we have to do is to find Hazel, and you force from her a promise to wed me when I *prove* that Taylor is dead. Once she promises, she will not go back on her word."

"No. You are right. Hazel's word is as staunch as adamant. But where do you think she is?"

"Beak knows. Hunt him up in the morning and make him tell you, or arrest him for abduction. I have no doubt but what it will be an easy matter to find the girl."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PERPLEXED DETECTIVE.

WHEN Detective Jim Beak arrived at his office the next morning, he was not a little annoyed to find that Spider had not yet put in an appearance.

Instead he found a slip of paper, in the handwriting of the young gamin, which read thus:

"DEAR JAMESY:—

"Can't wait fer ye. Got 'portant bizness on hand. You remember old Jake Morgan, the burglar, who got out of prison 'bout two months ago? Well, I hev struck his trail, an' am after him like a dog after cats. He's up ter some devilry ag'in, an' I'm goin' to find out what it is. Yer know I owe him a grudge fer soakin' me over the head with a billy. So you won't see yer darlin' till he has got some news."

"Yours till death,

"SYLVESTER SPIDER."

"After Morgan, eh?" Beak muttered, as he seated himself at the table. "I wish he'd let Morgan alone, and attend to my needs. The old chap hasn't been bothering any one since he got out of prison last time, and I reckon he will lay low for a while yet, anyhow. Spider will spend his time on a wild-goose chase."

"And now I suppose the next thing before me is to hunt up this Terrol Taylor, and break the news to him that he is a villain and a bigamist. I don't fancy the job a bit, but I don't see any

help for it. I pity the poor girl he has made a dupe of more than all."

Spider had given him the directions where Mrs. Morton lived, and he had no doubt but what he would find Terrol Taylor there.

It was yet too early, however, to look him up; so, locking his office, the detective spent several hours in dodging about town and performing a few errands of minor importance. He had no doubt but what Harrington Hurst would visit his office during the morning, and he was not quite prepared to meet the ex-speculator, just yet.

During his walk he passed the hotel where Hazel was stopping, but of course saw nothing of her.

Although he had always held forth that he cared very little for the female sex, and distrusted and avoided them, he could not help wondering if he had not taken a decided fancy for the unfortunate Miss Hurst.

It was after ten o'clock when his stalwart frame darkened the doorway of Mrs. Morton's candy store, which he entered, to find Mrs. Morton presiding behind the counter.

"Good morning," Beak said, hardly knowing how to begin his investigatory conversation. "Ahem! is Mr. Taylor in, may I ask?"

"Mr. Taylor, sir?" replied the widow, in surprise.

"Yes, madam."

"There is no Mr. Taylor here, sir, nor do I know any gentleman of that name."

"Indeed! Let me see—no! I cannot be mistaken. This is the place I was directed to. Why, madam, have you not a daughter called Myra?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"Ah! And was she not married last night, to a man named Terrol Taylor?"

"Indeed, no, sir! Myra got married last night, but not to Mr. Taylor. Myra's husband's name is Carrol Carter."

Jim Beak gave vent to a prolonged whistle, and his face, usually imperturbable, showed how great was his surprise.

"Carrol Carter?" he echoed. "You are *sure* this is the name, madam?"

"Why yes, sir. Carrol Carter is his name—that is, sir, the only name we have ever known him by."

"How long have you known him?"

"About six months, sir."

"Where and how did your daughter make his acquaintance?"

"I am sure I couldn't tell you, sir—I s'pose likely she met him coming from work, and they got acquainted in that way, sir? But, why do you ask so many questions—what is the matter?"

"The matter is, madam, I am looking for a man by the name of Terrol Taylor, and had been informed that he was married to your daughter. There may be some mistake, however."

"Oh! there must be, of course. Are you a detective, sir?"

"I am."

"Ah! then, that accounts for your questioning. Carrol is a very nice young man, and it's a very nice match."

"Is the gentleman about?"

"No, sir. They rented a couple of furnished rooms complete for housekeeping, bright and early this morning, and have gone and taken possession of them. Myra had a little money saved up, and they're to get a thousand dollars to-day, from a gentleman, as a wedding present."

"Ah! how is that?"

"Well, you see, it is somewhat romantic. A gentleman who claims to be an unknown friend of Carrol's, came here yesterday, and stated that he had heard Carrol and Myra were in love with each other. I told him perhaps they were. Well, when Myra came home, he told her that if she would influence Carrol to marry her, immediately, he would make her a present of one thousand dollars, but Carrol was to know nothing about the bargain. He gave as his reason that Carrol had an eccentric uncle, or other relative, who proposed to give the young man a handsome sum of money providing he got married, *at once!*"

"Indeed. Why, this is by all odds the most remarkable thing I ever heard of. This visitor, then, was commissioned to act as go-between."

"Yes, sir."

"Did your daughter accept this strange proposal?"

"No, sir, she did *not*! She said she would have to think it over, and would leave word with me before she went to work this morning. Last night, however, Carrol came, they took a walk in the park, and—well, Carrol proposed,

and they were married before they got back. I suppose the gentleman will be here with the money for them to-day. Isn't it romantic, sir?"

"Very," Beak assented, a trifle grimly. "What is this go-between's name?"

"Mr. Gilbert, sir."

"Ah! Mr. Gilbert, eh? Can you describe him, ma'am?"

"I believe I can, sir. He is quite tall, and of muscular build. He is from thirty-five to thirty-eight years old, rather pale, has jet-black hair and eyes, while his mustache is mixed with gray; and he dresses very stylishly."

"Gilbert Guion again, as I live!" the detective mentally commented. "Good gracious! where is a fellow ever to get at the bottom of this complicated case?"

Aloud, he said:

"Well, I guess I must be going. Would you mind telling me where I can find Mr. Carter? I'd just like to have a look at him to convince me that he is not Taylor."

"Certainly. They have rooms, he and Myra, at No. — Callowhill street. Is there anything bad about this Mr. Taylor, sir?"

"Oh! no, not so far as I positively know, as yet," Beak replied, not wishing to needlessly alarm her.

He then took his departure.

By the time he reached No. — Callowhill street the noon whistles were blowing.

On inquiring for Mr. Carter, the landlady conducted the visitor to the second story and he was ushered into the front room.

There were two neatly-furnished communicating rooms, with folding doors, which were now open, revealing the pretty domestic picture of Myra Carter engaged in preparing the first meal in their new home.

Carrol came into the front room, his face flushed and pleasant, for he had been assisting Myra to set the table.

"Mr. Carter, I believe?" Beak said, bowing.

"Yes, sir; and you?"

"My name is Beak. I have called to see you, sir, on a matter of considerable importance. Can you spare me a few minutes in private? I will make known my business, as we take a turn around the block."

"Certainly. But I have no secrets from my wife—why not be seated here, sir?"

"The matter I have in hand is for your ears first."

"Ah! Well, then, I will go with you."

He procured his hat and they descended to the street.

"My friend," said Beak, "believe me I am most sorry to be forced to call you away from that pretty home scene up-stairs, to perhaps make you unhappy, but it is my duty. You were married last night, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Under the name of Carrol Carter?"

"Why, certainly, sir. What other name would I have used but my own?"

"That is not your own, young man—or, at any rate, you have borne another one?"

"That is not true! What do you mean?—who are you, sir, and what do you mean, I say?"

"I am Jim Beak, the detective, and I have called upon you to make you acquainted with the unpleasant fact that you are a bigamist!"

"A what?" Carrol demanded, stopping stock-still, and staring at Beak, in utter astonishment.

"A bigamist. While having one wife living, you have gone and married another, an innocent and trusting girl, and made yourself liable to arrest."

"It is false—false as false can be!" Carrol cried, his cheeks flushing with anger. "I never courted, much less married, any girl but Myra Morton. Detective though you may be, you are sadly off track this time."

"Oh! come now; that won't work. I presume of course you realize the unenviable scrape you have gotten yourself into, but it won't do you a bit of good to make any denials. How long since you dropped the name of Terrol Taylor?"

"I never used such a name, sir, as applying to myself—indeed, I don't think I ever heard of the name."

"You were never known as, or called, Terrol Taylor?"

"Positively not, sir. You have mistaken me for some other man."

"Where have you lived lately?"

"I have taken my meals at restaurants, and lodged at lodging-houses."

"Ever at — Oxford street?"

"No, sir."

"Or No. — Montgomery avenue?"

"No, sir."

Beak hesitated a moment, bit his lip, and surveyed Carter searchingly; but there was no change in the young man's face.

If these straight denials were lies, his manner did not betray it.

"Did you ever know a girl named Hazel Hurst?" Beak finally went on.

"No, sir, I did not. Myra Morton was the only lady acquaintance I have made within a year."

"Did you never see this before now?" and the detective handed him the letter Spider had found.

Carter shook his head, after reading it.

"I never saw it before, sir."

"Have you been in the habit of lounging around the vicinity of Ninth and Sansom, much?"

"I have been around there quite frequently, when there were horse sales at the Bazaar."

"Did you ever see any other person around there who looked like you—almost your very counterpart?"

"I did not."

"Well, all that I have got to say, Mr. Carter, is that you are either a most infamous liar and villain, or else a grand mistake has been made."

"It surely is a mistake. Will you give me the particulars?—for, naturally, as I am accused, I am much interested."

"Well, in case you are innocent, I should presume you would be. The case is this: A girl named Hazel Hurst fell in love with a young man named Terrol Taylor. He was poor—she was rich; therefore he had not access to her home. They, however, met clandestinely, and one night, at a social gathering, were participants in a so-called mock marriage—fools that they were."

"Ah! I think I see. The mock marriage turns out to have been valid."

"Yes. I believe it is generally conceded, in this State, that such a marriage holds good. Besides this, it turns out that the ceremony was performed by a regularly ordained minister, which doubly clinches the matter."

"Well, you can bet high I'm not the man that got caught!" Carter said, emphatically. "I don't flatter myself that I'm any smarter than the average man, but you can bet all you are worth I'd be a little too smart to put my head into a yoke like that."

"I don't know about that. I am not so sure. You see, this Terrol Taylor has not been seen by his wife since the marriage, which occurred about three months ago. And, I'm still of the opinion that you are Taylor, and have been lying to me most outrageously."

"I swear before God, sir, that I am not Taylor!"

"Will you swear—can you prove—that your name is Carrol Carter?"

The young man hesitated, and changed color.

"Well, no," he finally admitted, "for it is not. Several years ago the disgrace my father had put upon our name caused me to renounce it, and I adopted that of Carter."

"What name did you formerly bear?"

"I must decline to tell. But rest assured that it is as different from Taylor as A is from Z."

"Well, I am sorry. But I am afraid I shall have to arrest you, Mr. Carter."

"Oh! for the love of God, do not, sir! Just think what a terrible blow it would be to my loving wife! I am not Taylor, sir—indeed, I am not! I beg of you to spare me, and to look further until you do find the real man. Spare me such a disgrace as arrest!"

"No doubt about the disgrace of it, and I should feel deucedly sad to inflict it upon your wife, who appeared to be a nice little woman. But, you see, if we detectives allowed ourselves to be tender-hearted in such things, we would never be able to cope with rascality. However, I have a plan I will endeavor to use as a test. Will you go with me into the presence of Miss Hurst, and allow her to pronounce whether you are her husband or not?"

"Yes! yes! only too gladly! Lead on! I am positive she will tell you you have made a mistake."

"I hope so, too, but be not too sure. She loves Terrol Taylor too passionately to make any mistakes, and if she says you are the man—then what?"

"Oh! my God, I do not know! It will be false, and I will be the victim of an awful mistake—or else, a villainous piece of blackmailing."

"Pshaw! Women don't blackmail men that haven't got enough boodle to make it worth their while—no, indeed! But come. I will take you to see Mrs. Terrol Taylor."

And Beak led off.

Giving one longing, despairing look back toward the house where he had left his young wife so happy, Carrol Carter followed in the detective's wake.

His head was bowed, his face white, and he appeared as if in great mental and bodily distress.

Poor Carter!

He was indeed in an unenviable and trying position.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIDER RUNS HIS WEB.

SPIDER had reached Beak's office that morning about an hour earlier than the detective himself, and had posted himself in the doorway to cogitate over the situation and to study the faces of people passing—one of his pleasantest diversions.

He was thus occupied when he saw an old, slouchily-dressed man coming down the street at a shuffling gait. He was at least sixty years of age, and his features were scarred and wrinkled, his beard and hair long and liberally sprinkled with gray, his form once large and muscular, and his eye yet remarkably keen and piercing in its glance.

His clothes and foot and head covering were of the coarsest and cheapest description, and he looked decidedly like a man who had not recently been on good terms with prosperity.

"By gracious!" Spider exclaimed, in an undertone. "Ye may kick me fer a cat ef et ain't thet old sardine, Jake Morgan, who soaked me over the head with a billy! Oh! Jakie! I've got et in fer you, sure's sugar's sweet. Wonder where ye'r goin' an' what ye'r up to? Some devilment, I'll bet. I kin tell it by ther twinklin' o' yer eyes. Jest guess I'll leave word fer Jamesy and take a quiet sneak after you."

And putting his thoughts into execution, the young gamin hastily scribbled the note Beak had found, and thrust it under the door.

By this time old Jake Morgan had passed.

This man was better known to the criminal courts than most any one following his profession—that of burglar. He had begun his downward career when but a boy, and had never abandoned it. He had been in prison many times, under severe sentences, but it somehow happened that he never served his full time out like other prisoners. Just why, no one appeared able to explain, but it was nevertheless a fact.

His last term at Cherry Hill had been for three years, but he had got off with two, promising to lead a better life.

It seemed he meant it, too, for he kept himself so quiet that no suspicion of participation in burglaries could be laid upon him.

But, as the gamin had alleged, he had seen a twinkle in the old scamp's eyes that apprised him of mischief; so when Morgan had got half a square down the street, Spider crossed to the opposite side and followed him. This was an easy job, as Morgan trudged along without looking back.

"The old man 'pears kinder shaky in the knees," the gamin soliloquized, "an' I reckon it won't be long before he passes in his checks. 'Bout one more term at Cherry Hill would fix him. And I'll bet peanuts ag'in' peggin'-awls thet the old sardine ain't goin' ter croak, till he makes one more big attempt to collar onto a fat boodle. He uster hev quite a gang o' pals, but I reckon they must hev shook him and started in bizness on their own hook since ther old man's gettin' his gray cap on. Sich is life!"

When Morgan reached Sixth street, he turned into it and followed it until he reached South. Then he once more took an eastward course, until he finally reached the river front, when he went out on one of the piers in the vicinity, and became lost to view behind a number of high tiers of cordage, with which the wharf was nearly filled.

No vessel was anchored in the immediate vicinity, consequently no business was going on, on that particular wharf.

Spider did not venture out on that wharf, but took up a position, not far away, where he had a prime chance to see who came off, or went on.

"I'd jest give a cud o' terbaccer ter know what old Morgy is up to," he mused. "Them bales o' rope aire too big fer him ter steal, an' ther don't 'pear to be any one else on the wharf. Wonder if he'd go an' drown hisself? Nixee, Reuben! Too much anymile speerit 'bout old Jakie ter give up ther ghost in that fashion. Mebbe he's gittin' romantic in his old age, an' hes gone out to l'arn what ther sad sea waves o' ther Delaware aire sayin'. That ain't probable,

nuther. Jakie ain't one o' them sentimental dudes w'ot git stuck on sad sea waves. No, sir-ee! But what the blazes is the old man up to, anyhow?"

One—two—three hours passed, without the gamin's getting a solution to the mystery.

At last, thoroughly disgusted with his tedious wait, he was about to venture upon the wharf when he saw a man coming rapidly down the street.

As the new-comer drew nearer, Spider recognized him, and gave vent to a whistle of surprise. And little wonder; the man was none other than Gilbert Guion.

"I'll be kicked for a cat ef et ain't the chap I upset, an' w'ot my gal, Botts, is goin' ter work for," Spider mused.

"Wonder what he's doin' down here? What! goin' out on the wharf? Ho! ho! I think I scent ther peculiar odor of a full-grown wharf mice. Et jest strikes me there's goin' to be a meetin', 'twixt Guion an' old Morgy? Thet Guion kinder looks like Morg, too. Shall I be an eaves-dropper ter this interview. Waal, I should cuckoo! I will walk into their parlor, said the Spider to their fly."

And waiting until Guion had disappeared beyond the piles of rope, the gamin glided out upon the wharf, and was soon on top of one of the uppermost bales, where he could hear without being seen.

"Now, then," he mused. "I'm prepared to hear all that is sed, an' I hope they will fire ahead."

His hopes were to be realized.

"This is a deuce of a place for a meeting," Guion was heard to say. "Are you sure there are no eavesdroppers?"

"Yes! yes! I've been here for hours, and no one came out on the wharf. There's no vessel near, and there'll be no work heretill one comes. Besides, I've got my terriers ears yet, an' ef any one came on the wharf I'd hear 'em you bet!"

"Well, what do you want, old man?" Guion demanded, with considerable gruffness.

"Some of the 'root,' of course," the old hard case retorted, with a chuckle. "You can't expect your poor old—"

"Shut your mouth!" fiercely cried Guion. "No more of that! I'm gettin' tired and sick of your eternal demands for money, d'ye know it?"

"I can't help it if you are," Morgan replied, doggedly. "You dare not refuse me, or I'll bust yer hull game up, you bet yer boots!"

"And for two cents I'd chuck you over into the river!"

"And I'd swim out, like a sailor!" with a disagreeable laugh. "Oh, I tell you, boy, there's no use o' your buckin' ag'in' yer dad, fer—"

"Curses on you! Didn't I tell you to shut up?" raved Guion. "If you want to see me, hold your tongue! What do you want money for?"

"What does a man want when he's hungry? Bread, of course. But come; enough of this. When are you going to have those jobs ready?"

"That's hard totell. The old man is growing more stubborn and unmanageable every day he lives, and clings to the hope that he will find that boy, Mark. His money he still keeps tied up in the Safety Deposit vault, and all my persuasion for him to draw it out and keep it in a safe in his own house is without result. As you know, I have told you that I believe a will exists in Mark's favor; anyhow, the lawyer calls twice daily at the mansion, and if a will is not already made, one is likely to be, ere the old man drops off. He ordered me to get him a young girl for a nurse, at fifty per week. I complied with his request, and I think I have got one I can twist around my finger. If so, the chances may be a little more favorable in that quarter. But I wouldn't stake my life we will ever make a scoop. When I ask for a few hundreds it is not refused, but the old fox is continually harping that he would like to find Mark."

"But, of course, he will not find him?"

"Not if I know myself!" was the reply. "Fortune has favored me in getting Mr. Mark into a predicament he won't be likely to get out of soon."

"Good! And now, the other case?"

"Oh, things are progressing as well as can be expected, I think. Some of the thunder-clouds linger yet, and my schemes may possibly fail. But even if they do, the nut will still be ready to crack, for our mutual benefit."

"I hope it won't be long before I get a chance to crack it," Morgan declared. "I'm anxious to try my old hand once more."

"The opportunity may come sooner than you

expect, old man—sooner than you expect. Matters may assume such a form that it will be necessary to act upon short notice; but I hope not. And now, remember I am short; will a hundred dollars do you?"

"Yes, that will do—for the present."

"Then here it is. Now I must be off. Remain closely around the old haunt, for if I want you I will then have no trouble in finding you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Then, so long. I must be going. Don't spend that for rum, but keep yourself ready for business."

And Gilbert Guion strode away, while old Jake sauntered along upon the street, with Jim Beak's little pal in his wake.

"My heyes!" he mused. "I know'd I could smell a rat—a reg'lar Norwegian on stilts!"

CHAPTER X.

OLD CHRISTOPHER'S QUEST.

EARLY that same morning, Miss Nellie Botts had bundled up her few personal effects, kissed her sad, wan mother good-by, and started for the West Philadelphia mansion of old Christopher Guion, where she was to take up her position as nurse, at the to her astonishing salary of fifty dollars a week.

She was in high spirits, and her sparkling eyes and joyous face attracted the attention of every one in the street car.

At last, after a long ride, she reached her destination, a handsome old-time residence, set down in spacious grounds, and mounting the steps, she rung the bell, feeling a little nervous lest her appearance should not be "tony" enough to suit the old man; for she had no doubt but what she could suit him, in other respects.

The bell was answered by a fat, jovial-looking negress, who appeared to apprehend the cause of Botts's coming.

"Oh! you'se de new nuss girl, I 'spect," she said. "Come right in. De ole man he is in de parlor, waiting for you."

And Botts was ushered into the presence of old Mr. Guion, who was seated in an easy-chair, arrayed in an elaborate dressing-gown and smoking cap.

He was probably eighty-five years of age, tall, thin and angular. His face was little more than the skin drawn over the bones, his cheeks were sunken, and his hair white as driven snow. He wore no beard, whatever; and his eyes were supernaturally bright and keen.

"Dis hyar is de new girl, sah!" the negress said, and then waddled out of the room, leaving Botts standing before her new master.

"Sit down, my child," Mr. Guion said, pointing to a chair, and speaking in a kindly tone. "Sit down. You must be tired. Let me see: your name is—"

"Nellie Botts, sir."

"Nellie eh? That's a pretty name, to be sure. My stars!"

The old man had put on his gold-rimmed spectacles, and was gazing at Nellie very earnestly.

"My stars!" he repeated, directly, "your face is very much like—like one that used to be familiar to me. Are you quite sure your name is Botts, my dear?"

"Oh! yes, sir!" Nellie hastened to say, a rift of color passing over her face. "If you will tell me what my duties are to be, I will get to work, sir."

The old man scratched his head, a moment, and gazed thoughtfully at the Axminster carpet, beneath their feet.

"Oh! there'll not be much for you to do," he said, slowly. "I wanted some bright, genial spirit, more for company, than as a nurse, for I am not so helpless, nor half so near dead as many think and wish I were. Ha! ha! I may outlive 'em all, yet!"

"Surely no one could wish you dead, sir?"

"Couldn't they? Well, my dear child, that's because you don't know. By the time you live to be eighty-five, you will have a better knowledge of the world and its worldliness. You see—but, nonsense. I will not intrude my gloomy forebodings on you. You may go, now, and hunt up the housekeeper. She will show you where your room is. In half an hour, you may come here, ready to go driving."

Nellie gladly arose, and left the room, her cheeks burning with shame.

"Oh! my, I wonder if he suspects that I lied to him, when I assured him my name was Botts," she murmured. "He seemed to recognize me, but I cannot remember that I ever saw him, before. But, then, I was younger, than now."

She hunted up Rosa, the housekeeper, and was piloted to a prettily furnished room, and soon felt herself considerably more at home, in the great mansion.

After being shown around generally, by the housekeeper, she returned to the parlor, where she found Mr. Guion dressed, and evidently in waiting for her.

"Did you wish me to accompany you, sir?" Nellie asked.

"Of course, my dear. I am going to make a brief call on an old friend I have not met for a couple of years. But, before we go, sit down. I have something to say to you, for I take you for an honest girl."

Nellie sat down, feeling very nervous, indeed.

"Now, you see," Mr. Guion said, "I am a very old man, and don't know what minute I may be called away from this life—the sooner the better, for that matter. When I go, I must of course leave behind all my money, which is no inconsiderable amount. And there is but one person I would leave it to, he being my grandson."

"The gentleman who hired me, I suppose?"

"Not he! True, he is my grandson, but not the one I mean—nor is he the one I would leave my property to—ah! no. But let me tell you. Years ago, I had a most beautiful daughter, who was the pride and joy of my life, but she contracted an unfortunate marriage with an unprincipled scoundrel, against my will, and I drove her from my home. The man she married, one Jake Morgan, turned out to be a criminal, but she clung to him for years, and bore him two children, one of whom she named Gilbert Guion Morgan, and the other simply Mark Morgan."

"Well, after over fifteen years, she came to me one bitter winter's night, dying from cold and starvation, and begged me to take her in, and my heart relented, and I did so. She had the boy Gilbert with her—he was then a lad of thirteen or fourteen—but, she could give no clear account of her infant child, Mark, more than that she had lost him."

Her husband, Jake Morgan, was in prison, for burglary. Well, I forgave her, and she died here in my house, first eliciting a promise that I would try to find Mark and would make him my heir, instead of Gilbert, who, she said would be like his father, while Mark was more like herself. So I promised that her last wishes should be respected."

"Years passed by, and Gilbert grew up, assuming my name; but, though I spent time and money, I never discovered Mark, until a few years ago, when he had grown up nearly to manhood. I made known to him who and what he was—for he was then living under the name of people who had brought him up—and assured him of my good intentions toward him. He received the news in a very matter-of-fact way—in fact, did not seem particularly elated over his prospective good fortune—and thanking me for my interest in him, said that he should try to get along on his own hook, and that he very much regretted to learn that he was the son of the notorious burglar, Jake Morgan."

"Soon after this, I lost track of him again—learned that he had changed his name, and have never been able to get track or trace of him since. I want to find him, and draw my will up in his favor. Perhaps you may have heard of him, or met him?"

"No, sir, I don't think I have. I have heard a young friend of mine talk of Jake Morgan, the burglar, but he never said anything about the man having any sons."

"Who is this young friend of yours?"

"His name is Spider. He sometimes sells newspaper son the street, and sometimes he is a detective's prentice, for he is very bright, very good and very honest."

"Ah! I am interested. Perhaps I may obtain a clew, yet. His name is Spider, eh? Who is the detective?"

"Jim Beak. He's a private one."

"This boy you say knows something about Morgan?"

"Indeed, he does. Morgan hit him on the head with a billy once, and Spider's never forgot him. He often tells me about it, for he—well—"

"Well, what?"

"He is—that is, he comes to see me, sometimes."

"Ah! yes, I see. He is your beau, eh?" and the old man chuckled, softly. "That's right—of course it is. I approve of young people keeping good and prorer company. I used to be quite a beau, myself, years ago. And now, I'd really like to see this young man. Where do you think we could find him?"

"I don't know, exactly, where you could find him, to-day, sir, for he don't often stay long in any one place. I expect maybe he will come out to see me, soon, however."

"Good! Capital! When he comes, I want to see him. Perhaps he may be able to give me much of the information I desire."

"Does not Mr. Gilbert know where his brother is?"

"He denies all knowledge of him, but I sometimes fancy he is lying. You see, Gilbert is a cute one"—with a knowing wink—"and he is fishing to step into my shoes when I step out. He thinks I don't know it but I do. He hopes, by playing loving and attentive grandson to me, that I will will him all I have got, but I won't. He's Morgan, clean out and out."

"Does Mark know he has a brother?"

The old man scratched his head.

"No, I think not!" he said. "I believe I did not tell him that. He does not know it, unless he has obtained the information from another source."

Leaving the mansion, they entered a private coupe, drawn by a dashing span of bays, and driven by a liveried coachman, and were soon being whirled away into town.

Reaching Broad street, they turned to the northward, and continued on, on, on, until they finally turned in Germantown avenue.

By this time Nellie had turned decidedly pale, and was very nervous, but the old man appeared absorbed in thought, and did not notice it.

Still the conveyance rolled on, square after square, until it drew up before the residence of Harrington Hurst.

Nellie's face was by this time white with palor, and she put her handkerchief to it, and pretended to cough, that Mr. Guion might not take note of the fact.

"You will remain here, my dear," the old gentleman said, getting out of the vehicle. "I will not be gone long."

"Thank God!" Nellie uttered, under her breath, as the old gentleman entered the mansion. "Oh! I was so afraid he would have asked me to enter that house! No! I never could have done it. I should have dropped dead on the steps. And, what can Mr. Guion want there? Dear me! I am trembling like a leaf. I wish—I wish I was a thousand miles from here!"

CHAPTER XI.

NO THOROUGHFARE!

THE face of Detective Jim Beak was that of a very puzzled man, as he and Carrol Carter walked rapidly toward the hotel where Hazel Hurst was stopping.

This was a strange case he was engaged upon, and one with but precious little light to work in.

He did not know what to make of the man who was walking beside him. Carter was the biggest conundrum he had ever struck in his life.

In due time they reached the hotel, and Beak sent up his card. The waiter soon returned, saying that Miss Alden would see them in her room.

Accordingly they were shown up and entered, Beak preceding.

Hazel ran joyously forward to meet him, not seeing that there was a second person until Carter had closed the door behind him.

Then she shrunk back with a startled cry, her gaze fixed upon Carter's face until it seemed as if she meant to look him through and through, her face white as death, her whole frame quivering as if with an ague-fit.

Carter stood calm and erect, his arms folded across his chest, and returned the stare as with a defiant interest.

For a minute, a pin's drop could have been heard.

Then Beak said:

"Miss Hurst, do you recognize this man?"

Hazel gave a sobbing gasp, and sunk back upon the sofa, burying her face in her hands.

"My God have mercy—yes, 'tis he!" she moaned. "Oh! Terrol! Terrol! Terrol!"

Wild-eyed and pallid, she arose, tottered across the carpet, and sunk upon her knees before him.

"Oh! Terrol, why do you gaze at me so strangely? Do you not know me? Have you so soon forgotten me?"

"Dear lady, I do not know you," Carrol replied. "As God is my witness, I never saw you before in my life!"

"Never saw me?—never saw me? Oh! how can you say that?"

"Because, dear lady, I am speaking the holy truth. My name is not Terrol Taylor, nor did I ever bear that name."

"Not Terrol Taylor? Not the man I wed? Then, in the name of mercy, who are you?—for you are his very image!"

"My name is Carter, ma'am—Carrol Carter. There has been some remarkable mistake here; I have been taken for a man I never saw or heard of. Mr. Beak has told me the story of your singular experience, and I voluntarily came here to let you see for yourself that I am not the gentleman you are looking for. If, as I suppose, you love this Terrol Taylor, your woman's instinct ought to tell you that I am not he."

Hazel arose to her feet, with a sobbing moan, and walked unsteadily to the further end of the room, where she stood a few minutes gazing out of the window.

Beak and Carter retained their respective positions.

Finally she returned, and paused near the accused Carrol, and with her wildly staring eyes gazed into those of his.

Her face was deathly, her every nerve seemed drawn to its utmost tension.

"You say you are not Terrol Taylor?" she demanded.

"I am not."

"Never was?"

"Never—never!"

"Never saw me before?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Never met me at social gatherings within the past six months?"

"Emphatically no. I have not moved in society, and it has never been my good fortune to meet a lady of the high social position which I understand you occupy."

"Will you swear to this before God?"

"I swear to it before God, as I expect mercy hereafter!"

"That will do. You may go. Mr. Beak, you may remain."

"Allow me," Beak said, stepping forward. "Before you go will you kindly write your name and address on this card, Mr. Carter?"

"Certainly, sir."

There was a pen and ink in the room, and sitting down at a table Carter executed the detective's request.

It was a fine style of chirography, both easy and graceful, showing plainly enough that he had not attempted to disguise his hand.

"And now, Mr. Beak," he said, rising to depart, "I trust that you are satisfied that I am not the man you want and that you will be honorable enough not to let your unjust suspicion get to my wife's hearing."

"I am not inclined to express an opinion yet, sir. At all events, until I prove you guilty I shall say nothing to mar the pleasant scene I witnessed to-day. Good-day, sir. I presume you can be found if wanted?"

"I can. Good-day, Miss Hurst, and to you, Mr. Beak!" and with a courteous bow Carrol Carter departed.

Beak took a turn up and down the room before he ventured to look at Hazel who had become seated on the sofa.

When he did look at her he saw that she was a great deal more composed but still white, and evidently suffering intensely.

He went and sat beside her and ventured to take one of her fair hands in his—an act she did not repulse.

"Miss Hurst, you cannot imagine how deeply I sympathize with you in your trouble," he said. "I see you are a greater sufferer than you are willing to admit."

"No!" she said, slowly. "I am not. I am a great deal braver than I was. I realize that I have been very weak and foolish and have resolved to be so no longer. You, sir, are very kind, and I am most grateful."

"Speak not of that. Tell me—tell me: what of the man I brought here?"

"He is not Terrol Taylor!"

"Not? Are you sure—are you satisfied on that point?"

"Yes, I am. At first I was sure it was Terrol, but now I am satisfied to the contrary, notwithstanding the fact that the two men are very counterparts of each other. Two human beings could not be more alike as regards mere personal appearance."

"Ah! Was your decision based in your belief of Carter's veracity?"

"Not wholly. There were several things which I consider in his favor. First, he spoke like a man who was telling the truth; second, his voice was finer than Terrol's; third, his hands were not nearly so small or white as Terrol's. No, Mr. Beak, I cannot believe, now, but what you have got hold of the wrong man."

But, tell me all about it, please; I am so anxious to hear all the particulars."

So he gave them to her. He began at the beginning, and told her everything.

"There's another thing in Mr. Carter's favor," she said, when he had finished. "If you have the letter Terrol wrote me, compare the writing with that of Mr. Carter and you will find the two are essentially different."

The comparison was made, and it was proven that she was right. The chirography of each was wholly dissimilar.

"I see—I see!" Beak commented. "It does look as if I had got hold of the wrong man. By the way, I told you about the challenge Spider found, but neglected to show it to you. Here it is. See if you recognize the writing—there might be such a possibility, you know, for it is rather an odd hand."

Hazel no sooner set eyes on the writing than she uttered a little cry of surprise.

"You recognize it?"

"I should say so!" It is the writing of Gilbert Guion!"

"Yes?"

"Positive. I would know it anywhere."

"And so Gilbert Guion—"

The detective did not finish the utterance, but arose briskly.

"I must be going," he said. "I've work to do, and plenty of it, perhaps."

"You will call again?" Hazel asked, putting her hand detainingly on his arm, and looking up into his face. "I do not feel so afraid when I know that one so brave and good is near at hand."

"Yes, I will come whenever I have a moment to spare, Miss Hurst. *Au revoir.*"

And he bowed himself out of her presence.

"So noble and kind!" Hazel murmured.

"How different men are. If it were not for my unfortunate marriage with Terrol, I almost believe I could—but stop! What am I saying? 'Tis too late for me to have any thoughts of aught else but misery and despair."

Beak went direct to his office, his brows knitted almost into a scowl.

Sitting down at his table, he proceeded to make out a concise memorandum of the case in all its points, as well as he could, considering what data he had thus far gathered. Then he ran it carefully over and devoted a straight hour to deliberation and reflection.

He formed a clearer idea of the intricate case and gradually developed his plans.

Carrol Carter was not Taylor.

He was pretty sure on that point.

But who was Taylor, and where was he?

This was a question most important to answer.

"I've an idea that my best move is to go to the house on Oxford street, and see what I can learn there," he finally decided. "This man Gilbert Guion is evidently playing a strong game, and for big stakes, and I shall have to ply my knitting-needles fast and judiciously to get ahead of him. Let me see. He appears to be playing three distinct games. First, he seeks to make Hazel Hurst his wife; and exercises a strong power over her father; second, he wants Carrol Carter and Myra Morton to be married, and his wishes have been complied with. Third, he wants to fight a duel with Terrol Taylor at the sea-shore. Hang me if I can see into it all yet."

"Nor I, by jingo!" cried a voice, and the Spider dodged into the office with a blacking-box swung over his shoulder. "Shine 'em up, Jamesy; give you a patent-leather shine for the small sum of half a dime—a nickel—five cents—ther twentieth part o' a dollar. Whoop-la! put out your quoits, heer, an' let me go fer 'em!"

"For I ain't Morgan the pirate,

A-sailin' on the sea!

An' if I don't make Jakey irate,

You may skin me fer a flea!"

he sung.

CHAPTER XII.

HURST'S REVELATION.

MR. GUION'S summons, at the door of the Hurst residence, was answered by a colored hall-boy.

"Is Mr. Hurst in?" was the inquiry.

"Yes, sah. Step into de parlor, sah. What is de name, sah?"

"Tell him an old acquaintance wishes to see him. That will be quite sufficient."

And Christopher Guion walked into the parlor with a step much firmer than could have been expected of a man of his age.

In a few minutes Mr. Hurst made his appearance.

He paused a few feet from where Mr. Guion was sitting, and gave him an inquiring glance;

then he suddenly stepped forward with extended hand, exclaiming:

"By Heaven! can this be true—Christopher Guion?"

"Yes, it is I," the old man replied, rising. "You did not expect ever to see me, Harrington?"

"I'll give you my word of honor—no! I had altogether lost track of you, hearing occasionally that you were gradually going down to that end we all must reach."

"And forgetting, at the same time, that you hold a large sum of money of mine that, at my demise, must be accounted for!"

"What?"

The ex-speculator's face changed color very rapidly.

"Just as I remarked," the elder man said, with wonderful composure. "Some five years ago I placed twenty thousand dollars in your hands to invest for me in speculation. You were rated A1, on 'Change, and I never bothered myself particularly to look after the amount, trusting in your honesty and our friendship of earlier days."

"But—"

"Hold on! I am talking at present. Some time ago I learned that you had retired entirely from the stock business, and as you did not call around, I felt it my duty to call on you and come to a settlement."

Hurst grew excited.

"Come to a settlement?" he ejaculated. "Do you mean to say that we are not already square?"

"Most positively and assuredly *not*, Harrington. I hold your papers for the money deposited."

"And I, also, hold your orders, which absorb the entire amount: investment, twenty thousand; profit, ten thousand; total, thirty thousand dollars!"

And Mr. Hurst certainly looked triumphant.

"My orders, sir?" cried Mr. Guion, rising to his feet. "Why, sir, what do you mean? I have given no orders, so far as the money I intrusted to you is concerned."

"You have not?"

"I have not!"

"You have not issued and signed orders, from time to time, authorizing me to pay to one Gilbert Guion, sums of money ranging from one thousand dollars up?"

"I have not. If you hold such orders they are deliberate forgeries!"

Harrington Hurst walked up and down the room, his brows contracted into a fearful scowl. But suddenly he brightened up.

"By Heaven! if this be so," he cried, "I have at last got an offset against my dread enemy! You say these orders are forgeries?"

"Most assuredly. As you can learn, I have not issued an order for years, as I have done no business. Furthermore, I was not aware that you knew Gilbert Guion."

"Indeed! I have known him, to my sorrow. I first had an introduction to him on Third street. He was an affable fellow, and soon won my friendship, and finally induced me to let him have a lodging room in my own house. He appeared to have plenty of money, and speculated quite successfully in stocks, and so I finally took him in. At last, however, unfortunately for me, he got a grip on me that I was powerless to shake off. And he has held it ever since."

"Well, well! this is indeed news to me. So Gilbert has been playing the villain, has he? Well, well! I always had an idea he was not above villainy. But tell me all about it, Harrington. You and I were always on good terms, and you can trust me, you know. Tell me what this power is that my grandson holds over you?"

Harrington Hurst hesitated a moment; then he drew his chair nearer to his visitor and sat down.

"I will tell you," he said, in a hoarse, unnatural tone; "but you will be the first one to know it. I will bare my guilt for once, and make a clean breast of the facts, as they are. I presume you have heard rumors concerning my family trouble?"

"I was told, some three years ago, that your wife and youngest daughter had committed suicide by drowning in the Delaware."

"It will never be known that such was the case, as no bodies were found. The only reason for the belief is, that my wife had often told her lady friends that she had a great mind to drown herself. She was very sensitive, and yet a woman of great force of character."

"Well, you see, the cause of our family trouble was rum. Up to a year ago I had been a

pretty stiff drinker, on which account we had more or less family jangles, and I am willing, now that it is too late, to admit that I was the principal one in fault."

"About three years ago I took my eldest daughter to Germany to finish her education, and after a tour by myself, in which I visited Baden Baden and Monte Carlo, I returned home. Liquor had pretty well gotten the upper hand of me, and I was far from being a pleasant man."

"One night, when I was intoxicated, I had a quarrel with my wife, and actually threw her into the street, and locked the door on her. My daughter Helen escaped by the rear way. Shortly afterward I awoke to a sense of the unjust act I had committed, and went forth in search of my wife and child. But I could not find them, or obtain the slightest clew to their whereabouts."

"The next morning's papers reported that one of the hands on a ferryboat had seen two bodies floating in the river—women's bodies. But, although I caused a search to be made for them, they were never found."

"Oh God! you can never know what I have suffered, Mr. Guion, since that fatal night!"

"It was a few days afterward that your grandson showed his cloven foot. He came to me and positively asserted that he and three other men had seen me push two women off of a wharf into the Delaware the night my wife and daughter disappeared, and that, unless I chose to pay well for it, they would cause my arrest for the murder!"

"Horrible!"

"You may well say so. I was thunderstruck—dumfounded. I tried to assert my innocence, but was only laughed at, and warned that I had the choice of paying 'hush-money,' or going to jail!"

"And, did you accede to this villain's demand?"

"What else could I do? I was grief-stricken, and felt guilty for what I had done; and then, too, the mysterious disappearance of my wife and child, had created a great talk in the neighborhood, and I was looked upon with suspicion—or at least, I thought I was. It was generally known, around here, that we had not lived happily, and the people seemed to take an insane delight in staring at me whenever an opportunity was afforded. Therefore, what could I do but become the slave of Gilbert Guion? Did I refuse, he swore to testify against me, and to produce three other witnesses to corroborate his testimony. The chances were ten to one that I would have been led to the gallows, within a twelve-month. So nothing was left for me but to yield to his demands."

"Well?"

"At first, he went lightly, taking as low as a hundred at a time. After a while he gave me the orders from you. I was suspicious, but on comparing the writing with former writing I had of yours, I could see no difference, and concluded the orders were genuine, and cashed them. After your balance had been exhausted, to a dollar, Gilbert renewed his demands for money, and would not listen to less than a thousand at a time. Had I not possessed a large fortune, he would have made me a beggar, ere this. In all, including your orders, he has taken over seventy thousand dollars, by this blackmailing scheme. Some six months ago he announced that my daughter Hazel, who had returned from Europe, beautiful and accomplished, must become his wife, and that I must persuade her to do so, under penalty of exposure to the law."

"The detestable wretch!"

"Worse than that. I endeavored to buy him off, but he would not listen to it. He did not want money, but wanted my daughter, and compelled me to promise that I would use all my influence in his behalf."

Mr. Hurst then went on, and narrated what is known to the reader; all about Hazel's strange marriage, the missing certificate, and Hazel's recent flight, ending with:

"So you see, Christopher, as a man, I am remarkably and bitterly cursed. I am at the mercy of a demon, and probably shall die thus, unless I can use the forged orders to checkmate him."

And Harrington Hurst buried his face in his hands, and was plainly both sorrowful and repentant.

Mr. Guion had listened attentively, and thoughtfully.

It was several seconds before he spoke, and a singularly weird silence pervaded the room in the mean time.

Finally he said:

"Harrington, I have listened to, and consid-

ered your story, and, believe me, I truly pity you. You are getting old as well as I, and it pains me to see you going down to your grave so unhappy. Perhaps, aged and infirm as I am, I can lift this weight, with a power as firm as that belonging to younger years. Will you give me those forged orders, Harrington?"

"What?" The ex-speculator looked up, as if he did not fully comprehend. "Give you those orders?"

"Yes—to be used for the sake of banishing this power that is bowing you down."

"How can you do that?"

"That remains to be seen. But I can do it. Give me the orders, and promise me to remain right here at home, inactive and quiet, and I will get you out of Gilbert's power."

"And—"

"I will do more. I will use my best endeavors to restore your daughter to you, on conditions."

"Name them!"

"They are that, if she still loves the man to whom she was so strangely married, and desires to live with him as a wife, you will take them in and treat them as daughter and son."

"Why these conditions?"

"For the sake of harmony."

Hurst arose, and went to his safe; he opened it, and speedily returned with a small package of papers.

"There they are," he said. "If you can lift this load that is bearing me down, do so. I will act entirely according to your wishes."

"Very well. Remain quietly at home, as I have said, and pay no attention to Gilbert Guion's threats. Whenever I am prepared to spring the trap on him, I will let you know. I must be going, now."

Hurst showed him to the door, and watched him get into the coupe.

As the driver gathered up the reins, the ex-speculator caught sight of the face of Nellie Botts.

With a groan, he staggered back into the vestibule, and fell to the floor, in a swoon, while the Guion equipage rolled away, its occupants not aware of what had happened.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VAIN SEARCH.

JIM BEAK looked on with a scowl, as the Spider entered his office, with his bootblack harangue and song.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"Pipin' old Jake," was the response, as the gamin dropped upon a chair. "Got any cigars, or chewin', or gum, or liquorice, or taffy?"

"No! What in the world caused you to neglect my business, to follow old Jake Morgan?"

"Interlect! I see'd by ther glim in the old house-pirate's eye thet he was in fer suthin' or other, sich, so I follered to enjoy the fun."

"And had your trouble for your pains."

"Nixee! I had pains fer my trouble. I was all cramped up on top of a bale o' rope, an' when I tried to straighten out my shanks I near got the lockjaw—fact!"

"Nonsense! If you've got anything worth telling tell it, and no more funny business."

"Well, I'll give it to you straight, and in short chunks. Follered Jake; Jake went to wharf, 'bove South street; went out on wharf, behind stacks o' rope; I wasn't fur off; bymeby, 'long comes man; goes out on wharf; meets Jake; I follers; gits on top o' rope; listens! Aire that short enuff? Kin make it shorter, ef ye want, as fer instance—"

"That will do! Who was the man who went out on the wharf—did you know him?"

"You bet! It was Gilly Guion—land-lubber, smouger, double-decker—"

"Gilbert Guion?" the detective interrupted, in amazement.

"You bet! That same snoozer in a new role, as the theatrical fakirs say."

"Go on; I am interested."

"Well, there's where my oration ends. Ef you wantter know *what* transpired, heer's my report, word fer word. Yer see, Jamesy, yer didn't teach me phonygraffy all fer nothin'. I'm as fly as ther next one, ef my name isn't Vanderbilt, an' a gold spoon in me mouth;" and the youth handed the detective a couple of sheets of paper, on which were the many curious hieroglyphics, peculiar to short-hand-writing.

Beak's face assumed a look of pleasure, as he surveyed the work of his apt pupil.

He was an accomplished stenographer, himself, and had made Spider his pupil, in dull times, with a result that was highly satisfactory to him.

His face betrayed that he was not a little sur-

prised, as he ran over Spider's report, which was complete, in every detail.

"So! so!" he said, finally. "It appears by this that Guion is old Jake Morgan's son?"

"Yes, chip o' the old stump!"

"And that, if Guion fails to score his point of marrying Hazel Hurst, he intends to rob her father, and also, most probably, his, Guion's, grandfather?"

"So it would seem, by the light of the moon."

"Well, I'll have to look after this matter. But first, and most important, we must look up Terrol Taylor."

The detective then explained how his adventure with young Carter had turned out, adding, in conclusion:

"So, you see, you got on to the wrong man, when you took Carter to be Terrol Taylor."

"Mebbe I did," Spider allowed, doubtfully, "but I wouldn't like to bet an oyster supper on it. I never see'd but one feller down 'round Ninth and Sansom that looked as Carter does, onless, if there is two of 'em, they took turns at loungin' around there. Then, too, both of 'em has a habit of pickin' their teeth with a goose-quill, nigh the side entrance to the Continental."

"There is no doubt a mistake, nevertheless," Beak said. "And I am going to try and ferret it out, at once, I'll not leave a stone unturned until I find the real Terrol, if he is in existence. You may remain here, and keep the office open. If any one calls, tell them I will be back in the course of a couple of hours."

Beak then went away.

He took a car, and rode north to Oxford street. He still had some distance to walk, but, finally, reached the house where Hazel Hurst had said Taylor boarded.

Ring the Bell, Beak waited for an answer to the summons, and after a time, the door was opened by a sharp-visaged woman, who surveyed the detective in a way calculated to indicate that she did not thank him for standing on her marble steps, which had recently been cleaned.

"What do you want?" she demanded, shortly.

"I called to see if a young gentleman named Terrol Taylor, was living here?" Beak said.

"No, there ain't!"

"Ah! But, such a party did live here, madam?"

"Yes. He had a room here."

"How long ago did he leave?"

"Yesterday. He couldn't pay for his room and so had to get."

"Indeed! Could you tell me where he went to?"

"No. His trunk is here, yet, an' won't go 'way, until he pays me what he owes me."

"How much is that?"

"Ten dollars."

"Could you tell me what kind of a looking man this Mr. Taylor is, and how he was dressed? I will pay you for what time of yours I take up, in asking all these questions."

"Then walk in, sir. Time is money to me, and I am willing to tell you what I can. Walk right in, sir."

Beak followed, and was conducted into a poorly-furnished parlor, where he was bidden to a seat.

"You see, sir, I have a photograph of Mr. Taylor, that he gave me a couple of years ago," the landlady said. "It is a good one of him, too."

She handed it to Beak, and he took it nearer to the light, and studied it attentively, while, in the mean time, the woman was giving him a description of Taylor's make-up, which tallied, in every detail, with that of Carrol Carter.

The face, too, was a very counterpart of Carter's, and, for the life of him, Beak could not see a point in Taylor's face that Carter did not possess.

"Was Taylor a temperate man?" Beak finally asked.

"He was, sir."

"What business did he follow?"

"He was a house-painter once, that I know, but he didn't work at his trade at all. He was always dressed up, and played the gentleman. He may have gambled, as sometimes he had quite a sum of money, and at other times he would be dead broke."

"Ah! Perhaps your surmise is correct. Did you ever hear him mention having participated in a mock marriage?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know that he kept company with any particular young lady?"

"I do not. His evenings, sometimes until a late hour, were all spent away from here."

"And so you have no idea where I would be likely to find him, ma'am?"

"Indeed, I have not, or I would tell you, sir."

He said, when he went away, that as soon as he could get hold of some funds, he would come and take his trunk away, and I presume he will."

There was evidently nothing more to be learned in this direction, and so, handing his informant a dollar, Beak took his departure.

He had found out a little, but not as much as he had hoped, by any means; nor had he gained any clew by which to find or trace Taylor—unless he were to reach him by mailing a letter to the general post-office.

This now seemed the only feasible plan, so he proceeded to the post-office, and indited the following, which he addressed to Taylor, and caused to be placed in the general delivery of the post-office:

"TERROL TAYLOR, Esq.,

Formerly of No. — Oxford street:—

"DEAR SIR:—On receipt of this, please send your address at once to James Beak, — Spruce street, or state where you can be seen, and you will hear of something important for you to know."

"Yours respectfully, JAMES BEAK."

"And now, while I've an hour to spare, I think I will pay the fair Hazel another call," the detective mused. "Somehow, I find it quite pleasant to linger in the light of her pretty eyes, and there's no telling but what I may take a notion to fall in love with her myself. Stranger things have happened."

CHAPTER XIV.

LUCIFER SINGS HIS SONG.

CARROL CARTER, after leaving the hotel where Hazel Hurst was quartered, went direct to his new home, feeling immensely relieved, where, a short time before he had been wrung by anguish lest Myra should believe him false, in the face of the accusation that had been brought against him.

On arrival home Myra questioned him closely as to what Beak had wanted of him, but he managed to allay her curiosity without really telling a lie.

"You will know all in a few days, dearest," he said, "and let that suffice. We are happy, and what is more priceless than happiness? So, ask me no further, but wait until I am fully prepared to spring a surprise on you."

So Myra did not question further, but trusted him implicitly, believing, of course, that it was some little business secret of his that would turn out well.

But neither knew that a dark and threatening cloud was hovering near, until it suddenly burst upon them.

It came in the shape of Gilbert Guion.

It was afternoon when the landlady ushered the villain up to Carter's rooms.

Carrol received him, as Myra was busy in the adjoining room, which served them as kitchen.

"My name is Gilbert," Guion said, in beginning. "You, I believe, bear the name of Carter."

"Carrol Carter, sir," was the reply.

"But that is not your real name?"

"Why do you ask that?" Carrol demanded, eying his visitor suspiciously, and with not a little surprise.

"Because I am aware that Carter is but an assumed name of yours, and have proof of it. Less than four months ago, you bore the name of Terrol Taylor. Am I not right, or do you deny that?"

Carter could scarce refrain from uttering a curse.

What did all this mean?

Was some conspiracy on foot to ruin him, when he had just entered into a state of happiness?

And to make matters worse, Myra entered the room just then, and recognized Guion, who immediately arose and extended his hand.

"Why, my dear young lady, can it be possible?" he said. "Alas! then, I am too late?"

"Too late?" echoed Myra.

"Too late?" cried Carter, both puzzled and angered.

"Yes, too late! Sit down, lady—sit down. And, sir, as for you, I am surprised," and he looked hard at Carrol.

"Probably you are no more surprised than I am!" was the reply. "What in the name of common sense do you mean, anyhow?"

"I mean that you are a deceiving and contemptible villain, sir! But, hold on! Let me tell you my story so all will be plain. Your real name is not Carrol Carter, as you claim, but is Mark Morgan."

Carrol Carter turned pale at this.

"Well?" he said grimly—"go on!"

"You have a grandparent, very wealthy, who, until now, has had it in view to settle upon you

a goodly sum of money as soon as you were married to some estimable young lady. So, having lost track of you, he commissioned me to hunt you up and try and get you married at once, paying me well for my labor. Although it was not my interest to do this, he finally prevailed upon me, and I took the job."

"I found you, and that you were keeping company with the lady who is now your wife. Without your knowledge I saw her, and offered her one thousand dollars to marry you at once. It seems she succeeded."

"Yes, we are married," Carrol said, casting a reproachful glance at Myra, who had turned nearly as pale as himself. "Myra, did you become a party to such a plot as this?"

"No, I did not!" Myra hastened to say. "I listened to this man's proposition, and told him he should have his answer this morning. As you know, however, you proposed to me on your own account, and all I did was to urge a speedy marriage. Am I not right?"

"Yes, you are," Carrol said, slowly—"yes, you are right. But go on, sir!"

And he flashed a glance at Guion that boded him no good.

"Well," the villain proceeded, "I had no doubt but what, with a woman's tact, Miss Morton could succeed in hastening the marriage, and so I took leave of her. It occurred to me, however, you being a young and attractive-looking fellow, that it might be well to look up your past, and see if you were free to marry one so young and innocent as Miss Morton. It struck me, too, that I remembered you in connection with another affair, and when I came to sift the matter to a certainty, I found that you already had another wife living. I did not learn this, however, until this morning, or I should have made an effort to prevent this unfortunate affair."

"Married? My husband married to another woman?" Myra exclaimed, growing white. "Oh, Carrol, is this true—is this true? Have you so deceived me?"

"It is not true! It is an accursed lie, and some devilish power is working against me to accomplish my ruin. And, do you know, I believe that you are that devil!"

And Carrol fired a look at Guion that would have made an ordinary man feel slightly uneasy.

Guion only smiled, however.

"I don't believe you are right," he said, gently. "All the hand I have had in this unfortunate matter has been as I have told you. I have worked simply in the interest of your grandparent. I first found you, and then made the sad discovery that you were already married. This will, of course, ruin all your chances with your grandfather, as you are a bigamist. It is a very, very unfortunate affair."

"Who is he married to?" Myra demanded between sobs.

"To one Hazel Hurst, the daughter of a retired speculator. The marriage was not an ordinary one by any means, but is, nevertheless, valid. Miss Hurst and this man who was known to her as Terrol Taylor, contracted a mock marriage at a social gathering one night, having no idea, I presume, that they were doing an act that legally made them man and wife."

"Taylor disappeared, however, after that night and had not been found until I was fortunate enough to run him down, or rather unfortunate enough, I should say."

"You are a liar, sir, from the word go!" Carrol cried, rising and pacing the floor in a passion, "and I will hear no more of this. I was never married in my life until I wedded this lady, and I defy you to prove it. There has been a singular mistake made. Another man visited me to-day and made the same charge that you have made—you remember the gentleman who called, Myra? He was a detective, and was laboring under the same mistake that you are. I took him before the lady whom he alleged was my wife, and told her to pronounce whether I was the man she had married or not. She said I was not. So you see your charge is utterly false."

"Nothing of the sort," Guion returned, with a confident smile. "I hold in my possession the certificate of your marriage to Hazel Hurst. You were married by one Timothy Binks, at No. — Montgomery avenue. Immediately after the marriage you were summoned away by a telegram, and have not been seen by your wife since. It is useless for you to deny this, for I have traced matters down to a certainty, and have the power to have you arrested for bigamy."

"By Heaven! I've a mind to murder you, you lying scoundrel!" Carrol cried, in very desperation. "Is it not sufficient that Hazel Hurst

herself should say that I am *not* the man she contracted this unfortunate marriage with?"

"No, for she is mistaken. I have the minister as evidence that *you* are the man, and a minister's word goes a great ways in court."

"Where is this man?"

"I left him at the corner. Shall I bring him?"

"Yes, bring him! If he is a minister, as you claim, it cannot be that he is conspiring against me, as you seem to be."

"You mistake my motive, sir. I wish you no harm, but, on the contrary, aim to get you out of this unpleasant predicament. I will bring the minister, but I am surprised that you do not make a clean confession, and save yourself the additional mortification of being confronted by the very man that married you."

"Bring your man, and if he dares to claim that he ever married me, I'll throw him through the window into the street!"

"And get locked up for doing it," Guion said, with a tantalizing laugh. "I think, however, we can settle this matter all right. I will return in a moment."

And rising, the arch-plotter left the room.

Myra, sitting on the sofa, then arose, and crossed the room to where Carrol sat in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

"Oh! Carrol, this is not true, is it?" she cried, dropping on her knees, before him; "oh! tell me it is not so."

"It is not true, Myra—it is not true. As God is my witness, it is not! But this man Gilbert evidently means to make me trouble, if he can. Come what may of this mistake, you will not doubt me, will you, Myra?"

"No! no! I will cling to you, my husband, until the last, and not believe that you have deceived me."

"May God bless you, then, for your words have made me stronger to meet this Lucifer, whom intuition tells me is conspiring for my ruin."

"Then, your name is Morgan?"

"Yes, my name is Morgan. Owing to the fact that my father is a very bad character, however, I have never used the name, but have retained the one I was brought up under—Carrol Carter."

Guion soon returned, accompanied by a tall, slim man, of clerical aspect, who was dressed in well-worn black broadcloth, and a silk hat that was very much out of style.

"This is the Reverend Timothy Binks," Guion said. "Now, Mr. Binks, you see this young man, here, who claims his name is Carter, instead of Taylor. If you were put upon the witness-stand, to testify, what would you say?"

Binks looked Carrol over, critically, and then answered:

"According to the best of my belief, sir, this young man is the one I married Miss Hurst to."

"Would you swear to it?"

"I would."

"Then, you may go. If your evidence is wanted, I will let you know."

Binks bowed, and took his leave, evidently only to escape the light of fury that burned in Carrol's eyes.

When he had gone, Guion continued:

"And now, sir, you will see that I have the power to haul you up in court for bigamy and separate you from this young lady. This I do not care to do, however if we can come to terms?"

"To terms, sir?"

"Exactly. You are in my way here, in Philadelphia, as I intend to marry Hazel Hurst myself, as soon as a divorce can be quietly gotten. So I'll tell you what I'll do: Take your new wife, and leave the United States forever. Go to Canada, or Europe—anywhere, so you leave the States, and never set foot in them again. Promise to do this and I will give you two thousand dollars, in ready cash. Refuse me, and I'll have you arrested, before the day is out."

"You will eh?" Carrol cried, springing to his feet. "Then if you do, I'll give you a better cause than bigamy for doing it!"

He threw open the door, and then leaped upon his tormentor and with the strength of a young Hercules, dragged him out into hall, where he pitched him headlong down the stairs.

The only wonder was that the villain did not break his neck, in falling. But beyond a bloody nose, he evidently did not sustain any serious injuries, for he quickly regained his equilibrium, and hurling a malediction at Carrol, stalked from the house.

CHAPTER XV. A NOTABLE CLIMAX.

MR. CHRISTOPHER GUION called upon Jim

Beak, that afternoon, and held a long conversation with him—the result of which was that Beak paid a visit to Middle Alley, and held a long conversation with Mrs. Botts, and the result of this was, that three persons received notice to call at Beak's office the next afternoon at two, namely, Harrington Hurst, Gilbert Guion, and Carrol Carter.

When the hour arrived, there were seated in the office, Christopher Guion, Beak and Mrs. Botts, who was deeply veiled.

Harrington Hurst soon put in an appearance, and was scarcely seated, when Gilbert Guion entered, and was followed in rapid succession by Nellie Botts, Hazel Hurst and Carrol Carter.

Beak got up, then, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

At which Gilbert Guion uttered an oath.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, turning pale with apprehension.

"It means!" Beak replied, "that *your* jig is up. You've done all the plotting you'll have a chance to, for some years to come, and don't you forget it! You will plainly see, if you take the pains to make note of who is present, that your goose is cooked."

The arch schemer dropped upon a chair, white and nervous, and gazed from one to the other, in a helpless sort of way, as if he did not know what to make of it, so startling the situation was.

"It was mainly through your grandfather, that I am able to arrest you as I now do. In the first place, you are guilty of one of the most atrocious cases of blackmail I ever heard of. You have charged Harrington Hurst with the crime of murdering his wife and daughter, when you *knew* they were alive, and where they lived. Under threat of swearing his life away, you have extorted large sums of money from Mr. Hurst, and even tried to force him to compel his daughter to marry you!"

"Go on!" the villain said, with a sneer. "Have you got any more petty charges to make?"

"Certainly I have. While you were working this game on Mr. Hurst, you were also trying another one on your grandfather, which will send you to State's prison for some years. I have in my possession the forged orders which you executed and which Mr. Hurst cashed."

"Well?"

"Nor is that all the evil you have been trying to do. Fearing your brother, here,"—indicating Carrol Carter—"would become your grandfather's heir, you have tried to force him to leave the country under penalty of being arrested for bigamy. You knew Miss Hurst had been wedded to one Terrol Taylor, and you also knew that your brother was a very counterpart of Taylor; so you planned to have Carter, here, married to one Myra Morton, and afterward to accuse him of bigamy, hoping to establish it as a fact, and thus force Carter to leave the country so that, failing in his efforts to find said Carter, your grandfather would draw up the will in your favor!"

Gilbert laughed dryly.

"You seem to have mastered the case very well, my fine fellow. But how you ever found out so much is beyond my comprehension. Have you got any more charges?"

"Two! You stole Hazel Taylor's marriage-certificate and have it now in your possession. That makes you a thief; to that I may yet be able to add the charge of murder."

"How so?"

"Because the real Terrol Taylor has disappeared!"

"How does that concern me?"

"Inasmuch as I hold a document in my possession, which is in your hand-writing, and challenges Terrol Taylor to meet you at Atlantic City and fight a duel, it concerns you in a very certain manner."

"Where did you get it?"

"It was found in the street."

"Then Taylor must have thrown it away. I *did* challenge him, because he slapped me in the face once. I have not seen him for several days, and do not know whether he intended to accept the challenge or not. I suppose he will never get the chance now?"

"I should presume not. Where is he?"

"I do not know, as I have learned that he has left the place where he formerly stopped, in Oxford street."

Just then a rap was heard on the door, and Spider's voice was heard, crying:

"Let me in, James! let me in, fer I've got the biggest kind of news fer ye!"

Beak hastened to admit him, and Spider came dancing into the room with a bundle of papers under his arm.

"Hi! by golly! Ye kin kick me fer a cat ef I ain't got news! Terrol Taylor has fell from a scaffolding, on which he had got a job o' painting, and broke his neck. Here's full account 'bout et in ther afternoon papers."

Beak seized a paper and read the item, which corroborated Spider's statement.

Terrol Taylor had fallen from a scaffold, where he was engaged in painting, in the northern part of the city, and had been instantly killed.

And so Hazel's strange marriage was no longer a marriage, after all!

For which Jim Beak secretly felt more rejoiced than he would care to confess.

Gilbert Guion, we have to add, did not get the deserts many another man would have received. He offered to refund every cent he had extorted in the pursuance of his schemes, he having speculated and made a great deal of ready cash, if he was allowed to go free, and it was finally so arranged. He was permitted to leave the country—never to return.

Harrington Hurst prevailed on his wife and daughters to come back and live with him—for the reader has, no doubt, premised that Nellie and Mrs. Botts were those who had been so long lost to him, Mrs. Hurst preferring to live alone in poverty rather than with a drinking husband in riches.

They are all happy now together, and Hazel is soon to wed Jim Beak, while Spider will, no doubt, lead Nellie to the altar in due time, seeing that she persists in regarding him as an extraordinary young man, who will some day be President of the United States. But not as Spider, for he confesses that his true name is not Spider but Sylvester—Samuel Sylvester;—that, as every street arab has his street name, he was known as The Spider; but now, having left the street by virtue of his promotion to a first-class school, he proposes to come forth as Samuel Sylvester and do credit to his name. As he certainly will!

Carrol Carter and Myra, too, are happy and doing well, Carrol having recently patented an invention from which he is making lots of money. And when old Christopher Guion dies, Carrol—for he still clings to the name with Christopher's consent—will become his heir.

Old Jake Morgan disappeared from Philadelphia shortly after his son's departure, and has not been seen or heard of since.

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